

# **Sermon on Sunday 14 September 2025 (8.00am and 10.30am online Eucharist) by Rev. Bill Church**

## **Gospel reading: Luke 10. 25-37**

There is a debate, triggered by the American Vice President J D Vance, about whether Christian ethics require or allow that the second commandment – Love thy neighbour – has a hierarchy of nearness.

That is to say, are you expected to love those closest to you, your family; then your neighbours; then your local congregation or community; then your own country; and only then those in other countries?

This all started in the context of slashing the United States' overseas aid budget, and as a rationale for stopping overseas aid until all the needs of the domestic United States could be met.

This was not a good starting point, but there is a debate to be had.

First of all, it is certainly true in a negative sense – if you don't love those near you, how can you truly love those far off? St John, in his First Epistle, writes: "If a man says, 'I love God', while hating his brother, he is a liar. If he does not love the brother whom he has seen, it cannot be that he loves God whom he has not seen."

Dickens in Bleak House, more amusingly illustrates that point when he portrays Mrs Jellyby as a diligent collector of funds

for the distantly and vaguely located people of Borriobola while completely neglecting her own children.

But for the main issue, the Parable of the Good Samaritan speaks loudly.

It was provoked by the question from a teacher of the law of Moses: "Who is my neighbour?".

Luke assumes the question was insincere, put just to test Jesus. But, anyway, it is a reasonable question to ask.

And the parable itself only answers the question back to front. At the end, Jesus asks the lawyer: Who did the right thing? Who had followed God's rule for his people, given to Moses in Leviticus, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"?

The lawyer had to give the obvious answer that it was the Samaritan who did the right thing, not the Priest or the Levite who passed by on the other side.

This must have been painful for him, because it meant agreeing that the one who best followed the Law of Moses was the one whom he and most of Jesus' hearers would have classed as outside the Law.

If you want to know from the parable who is the neighbour that you are expected to love, then you have to work it out for yourself.

The injured traveller was not in the Samaritan's family, nor from his street or village, nor even from his own faith or nationality.

But he was someone in need whom the Samaritan was in a position to help, being there and equipped with first aid and an ambulance donkey and enough cash to pay the innkeeper.

From this I deduce that your neighbour is: someone in need, whom you can help and who is willing to be helped (we have to assume this about the injured traveller), and for whom your help will be effective, not just a sop to your conscience (which was surely the case on the Jericho Road).

If there is someone in need whom you cannot help, for whatever reason, then love can be shown by prayer. But the Epistle of James mocks those who could help but just pray instead.

In the second great commandment, your neighbour is someone who needs help, whom you can help, who is willing to be helped and for whom your help will be effective.

Faced with that, as Jesus said: "Go and do thou likewise".