

Year C

Luke 10: 25-37

So what does this very well-known parable teach us?

“Be nice like the Samaritan, not nasty like the clergy!” *or*

“Feel very guilty when you walk past the homeless and decide to do nothing”?

or and there are countless different interpretations that might come to mind. In fact, I think it’s fair to say that this parable has been defined as containing the essence of Christianity and so we would expect lots of

different takes on it, especially when the parable is lifted out of Luke's Gospel and presented on its own terms. Unfortunately, that inevitable process of extracting and then analysing, removes the parable from its context and as a result interpretation can go awry. So, it is important that the parable is framed with Jesus' engagement with the lawyer. That supplies the immediate context which should direct the interpretation of the parable.

The lawyer asked; "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" What might that question sound like in today's speak? Might it be

something like; “Please tell me it will all be okay in the end”? Lots of people ask the question like that these days and those who don’t ask, maybe sometimes wish they could ask! We want to hear a resounding ‘YES!’ to the question, but we maybe fear we won’t. Please tell me it will all be okay in the end. Yes it will, but you are required to be moved to action.

We all have a tendency to pay heed to the rules whether we’re abiding by them or deciding to break them. We’re aware they’re there: rules that are often explicitly stated and sometimes rules that are implicitly

assumed. The lawyer in the story loved the rules. The law code and his adherence to it meant everything to him. He was very happy to journey down the road of the law - the rules - with Jesus. He was comfortable on that road so when Jesus told him a story about another road - the road from Jerusalem to Jericho - he no doubt became very unsettled. The poor man in the parable who journeyed on that road would have expected a safe journey in his own country, with his own people; the people of the law, looking out for him. But his adherence to these things left him bloodied and near dead

by the side of the road. His fellow countrymen: ambassadors of the law - the rules - passed by on the other side and left him for dead. Reliance on rules and procedures to guide and sustain will ultimately lead to breakdown and abandonment. Christianity is not about an adherence to instructions for that would make the gospel, the good news of God, law. The Gospel is not law it is life delivered through the mercy of God reflected in human kindness - more than that, a kindness that stuns us, that calls us up short, just like God's.

In February 2012 Cory Weissman led out the men's basketball team of Gettysburg College for their last game of the season. Four years earlier he had suffered a stroke that left him paralysed down one side. Four years of rehab and he was able to walk with a limp, but was still not able to play competitively. But before his stroke he had been on the varsity team and the Gettysburg coach wanted to give him a few seconds on court as a senior. So Cory was nominated captain and led out the starting five for what was both his first and last game for Gettysburg, for he was now due to graduate.

Knowing the struggle it was just to be there, the crowd and the players from both teams greeted him with wild applause. The Gettysburg coach gave him a few minutes on court before benching him.

With one minute to go Gettysburg was well ahead and the coach sent Cory back out on court. The Washington coach called time out and instructed his players to foul Cory Weissman. For those who don't know basketball this was a very generous act, for it meant Cory would be given two shots at the basket.

Cory takes his place at the free throw line, feels the weight of the ball in his hands, lifts and shoots. It misses badly. But he has a second and final shot left. Again he feels the weight of the ball in his hands, lifts and shoots. This time the ball flies straight through the hoop, and the crowd breaks out in thunderous applause.

The assistant vice president for athletics at Gettysburg, David Wright, later wrote to Washington College: “Your coach, Rob Nugent, along with his staff and student-athletes, displayed a measure of compassion

that I have never witnessed in over 30 years of involvement in intercollegiate athletics.”¹

Nugent didn't have to show kindness. It wasn't a part of the laws of the game for most teams but it was for Nugent and his team. The game would cease to be real without kindness. The rules would not make any sense without kindness. It needed to be shown, unexpectedly and outrageously to many. This is to be the Christian distinctive in all of life.

Isn't it incredible that when Jesus asked the lawyer, “who was the neighbour” in the

¹ Frank Record, “When there's more to winning than winning.” NPR Radio, Feb 22, 2012

parable the lawyer could not bring himself to say the simple words, “the Samaritan”? Instead he said; “The one who showed him kindness.” It was so outrageous that a Samaritan could act in this way, the pious Jew could not even utter his identity.

Ahmed Khatib a Palestinian boy, aged 12, was shot by an Israeli soldier in November 2005 when the toy gun he was waving was allegedly presumed to be a real one. Khatib was taken to an Israeli hospital in Haifa, but the doctors were unable to save his life. After his death his parents donated four of his organs to four Jewish and two Arab citizens

of Israel. Ahmed's heart was transplanted into a 12-year-old Druze girl. A Jewish teenager received his lungs. Ahmed's liver was divided between a seven-month-old Jewish girl, who did not survive the surgery, and a 58-year-old Jewish woman. His kidneys were divided between a three-year-old Jewish girl and a five-year-old Bedouin boy, Mohammed Kabua.

Ehud Olmert, an Israeli politician, called Ahmed's father, Ismail, extended his condolences and invited him to visit his office in Jerusalem. Ismail said: "I will go if it will promote peace. I will tell him one thing:

children have nothing to do with this conflict.”

Stunning, outrageous kindness that challenges the world to listen to God: to listen to Jesus who told a story about a man who was left for dead on a road. Do we still hear the story? If we do, are we living the story each day? Amen.