**SERMON FOR TRINITY 4 – FR KEITH BRISTOW**

**Sunday 10th July 2022**

**In my childhood, when there were only two or three TV channels to watch, I remember being disappointed each summer by the number of repeats that were shown. Clearly the BBC and ITV gambled on lots of people being on holiday and not being bothered. Nowadays, of course, repeats are what lots of the newer channels specialise in, and, as I have got older and make a habit of falling asleep during the programmes I’m trying to watch, I’ve come to think that repeats are not necessarily a bad thing! But, joking aside, looking again and again at other, more important things, is often a good idea to fix things I our minds, and today’s Gospel reading is a case in point.**

**As a preacher, I believe that, being part of the Church of England, sermons should follow form the readings the lectionary sets down. I’m sure that many other preachers would agree that if it were left to personal choice, they would often prefer not to have to preach on certain subjects or texts. Sometimes this might be because they are controversial, but often it’s because they are so familiar that it can be very difficult to think of anything to say that you haven’t said before. The big festivals, like Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are good examples. But being forced, by the lectionary, to look again at familiar stories, helps us, though, find fresh insights even in what is very familiar and hear what God is saying to us in them at this particular time. So, unlike TV repeats, re-reading Bible stories again and again, is far from being disappointing but actually extremely useful.**

**In the story of the Good Samaritan, that is so well known to us, I think He is challenging us, yet again, to look deeper into ourselves, and ask ourselves whether we really are doing all that we can to live our lives in the way that He wants us to live right now. Let’s consider the main points of the story we have just heard.**

**Firstly, the clever lawyer who poses the question to Jesus *‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’* already knows the answer – love God and love your neighbour as yourself. So, why he is asking? Does He think He can outsmart Jesus? If he does, he is clearly mistaken. Or, is He genuinely seeking more practical advice? Certainly, we read that *‘wanting to justify himself he asked Jesus - and who is my neighbour?* so it’s possible that he isn’t just trying to show Jesus up. Whichever it is though, Jesus’ reply, in the form of the story of the Good Samaritan, is a strong message to him and to us. We too actually already know the answer to the lawyers’ question, that it’s not enough to just have knowledge of the gospel message, we too should be putting it into practice. We shouldn’t just talk the talk as followers of Jesus, but be emulating Jesus’ example of practical service to those around us. As the writer of the Letter of James says *‘be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves…..they will be blessed in their doing’ (James 1 v 22 & 25).***

**Secondly, and just as importantly, the story teaches us that, as disciples, we should never let prejudice get in the way of offering people our help and support. Jesus reached out to all who needed Him, regardless of who they were and where they came from. Indeed, those he helped were most often people that others didn’t want anything to do with – the poor, the sick, those with unpopular jobs like tax collectors, even foreigners – think of the Samaritan woman at the well. It is no coincidence then, that Jesus also makes the hero of today’s story a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans didn’t get on. The Samaritans were the descendants of mixed marriages between pagans and the Jews who had lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel conquered by the Assyrians hundreds of years before. They had their own temple and were rejected by the Jews whose faith centred on Jerusalem. In today’s story though it is a Samaritan who does what the Jewish priest and Levite *should* have done. They turn their backs on the man in need, whether from fear, disgust at his injuries, or maybe simply because they couldn’t be bothered to spare the time to help him. Whatever their reasons, they let the man down. But the despised outsider not only makes time for him, but gives of his money to ensure that the man has the full opportunity to recover. What does this say to us, then, who also often make the excuse of busyness for not helping others? I always say that we make time for what we want to do, we make excuses for what we don’t! That’s clearly not good enough for Jesus and we need to take note.**

**When Jesus turns the tables on the lawyer and asks him the question after the story – *which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?* it is telling about the lawyer’s character, that he can’t even then bring himself to name the man as a Samaritan. He replies ‘*the one who showed him* mercy’. Clearly the lawyers prejudices are deep seated and so he is not as close to inheriting eternal life as he imagined. He needed to rid himself of his prejudice altogether and learn to put his professed faith into practice with a lot more love and generosity. Jesus concludes by telling the lawyer to ‘*go and do likewise’* and that echoes Jesus words to his friends on Maundy Thursday after He has washed their feet. Like Jesus, who came to serve rather than be served, they are told to be people of service too – service without boundaries or self-imposed restrictions.**

**In our other reading this morning, from Colossians, Paul praises members of the church there for their faith in Jesus and the love that they have for all the saints i.e. their fellow Christians, because of the hope laid up for them in heaven. He sees that the gospel message is bearing fruit and growing among them and he prays that they may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will and spiritual wisdom to lead lives worthy of the Lord and fully pleasing to Him. He reminds them that through faith they have been rescued from the powers of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of His beloved Son. We would all do well to remember that as applying to us and genuinely strive to lead our lives as being worthy of the Lord.**

**Looking again at stories like the Good Samaritan are useful tools for keeping us on our toes! As we continue in faith year by year it is easy to forget or water down the basic principles that should underpin our behaviour each day. Leading a busy life is no excuse for passing by when someone is in need. Also, prejudice can so easily become entrenched in our thinking if we let it, that we should be constantly on our guard. If left unchecked it will become a barrier to us becoming the people of the Kingdom that Jesus came to bring in to our world. Actions do indeed speak louder than words, and people do scrutinise our behaviour when they know that we are church-going believers, and quickly make judgements about, not only our sincerity, but also about the relevance of faith itself. If they don’t see a difference in our attitudes and behaviour towards those around us, why should we expect them to take Christianity seriously and ever want to join us? We have a great responsibility to see that what we do, or don’t do, doesn’t put people off the faith, or make them see it as irrelevant to modern life.**

**We need to love God completely, and show that our love is real by putting it into practice in the Jesus way. We can’t of course earn our place in heaven by what we do – we get that free through faith, but living lives of service will demonstrate that our faith is real and sincere. Amen.**