**SERMON FOR TRINITY 4 | 10.07.22**

**Deuteronomy 30: 9-14; Colossians 1: 1-14; St Luke 10: 25-37**

**Well, I don’t recommend catching Covid! Having smugly thought that, after two years, I would get away with it, my variant was not particularly gentle with me and I certainly felt drained of any energy for what seemed like quite a long time.**

**But what a week to be affected! All that unfamiliar spare time to listen to wall-to-wall news bulletins following every twist and turn in the drama that was Boris Johnson’s resignation. Whatever political allegiances you have, no one could fail to be intrigued by the way the ‘will he/won’t he/’ see-saw narrative played out, hour by hour. Personally I missed BBC’s anchor, Laura Kuenssberg, and in retrospect she might have wondered whether this was quite the right time to retire – but then who was to know when this would happen… !**

**Looking back over this week I could try and tease out any number of familiar themes but - with the Parable of the Good Samaritan as our Gospel story – perhaps we might look at just one of the areas which has so concerned people: the morality of the Prime Minister. That is to say, for some, the reason why Boris lost the confidence of his party is not because of some particular piece of policy – as it was for Margaret Thatcher, say, or more recently for Theresa May. No, the question that kept emerging is ‘is this the behaviour or the moral example that is believed to be appropriate in a Prime Minister?’ Did he tell the truth; were his statements reliable? What motivated him?**

**Which is not a million miles away from the way Jesus sets up this story featuring a priest, a lawyer and a Samaritan. They aren’t any old people who happened to be travelling down that particularly dangerous stretch of road. No, they are ‘types’: people whose jobs or backgrounds are easily self-defining. We have instant expectations of whenever we use the word priest, lawyer – and (in this case), the reference to some rather disagreeable neighbours living not so far away in Samaria.**

**You don’t need me to tell you about the crippling effect on the Church that has emerged after years and years of revelations about what priests have done to children and to vulnerable adults. It has not just had a devastating effect on so many victim’s lives – it has almost re-defined the word priest and given the word such a negative spin that in certain places you might not even want to describe yourself as such. How could a priest of all people be involved in such things?**

**And lawyers? Less to do with sexual abuse but a great deal to do with money: how could someone earning those sorts of sums really refuse to take on legal aid cases? And by extension, in the week when Sir Mark Rowley has been appointed Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, how much can we trust the men and women in blue – our police?**

**But perhaps there is a pattern here? Perhaps Jesus is drawing our attention not just to the obvious need for compassion for someone in dire straights – but as part of a greater challenge to our stereotyping of particular people, professions and races.**

**Because this political crisis – if that is what it is – has thrown up scores of issues for those in public life not least that of ‘entitlement’ (as if some are really too important to be controlled by mere rules), privacy and perennial matter of class relationships within our society. And that has led to the question about who is willing to talk to whom – as if certain people, with certain accents and grammar, are less to be listened to than those education was rather more conventional. There have, too, been some pretty unsavoury racial remarks about certain candidates…**

**Was it just fear that stopped the priest and the lawyer helping the man on the road to Jericho? Were they just scared, saving their skins as many have suggested or were they both aware of the Jewish law that exempted them from touching the bodies of those who were dead or who were nearly dead? Or might it have been rather sicker than that: that this man simply wasn’t deemed ‘good enough’ for them to stop. He wasn’t one of them. What business was it of theirs he was half-dead?**

**The call to compassion which underpins this great story is hugely complex – and we are all caught up in it. It deeply affects who we talk to, how we talk to them and how we respond when they ask for help. It is about our charitable giving – those charities which we can support by Direct Debit in the comfort of our own homes – and the challenge of the person sitting in the street with one of those signs saying ‘I am hungry’. It asks about our instant rationalisations when certain types of people appeal to us and we put up the ‘anti scam’ barrier so very quickly.**

**As he knows well enough, Boris is a larger than life character and his strengths are often his weaknesses. Why is it that his skilful political nous seems to make it impossible for him to say sorry for example?**

**But in the context of the Good Samaritan story we might well ask whether we have given him too much or too little credit for his time as Prime Minister – based not so much on his track record but much more on our reaction to the kind of person he seems to be. Because the kind of judgements we make of each other (especially during this week) may need a bit more self-awareness if we are to avoid the knee-jerk concern with ourselves that Jesus is talking about in this piece of teaching.**

**So, to refocus on compassion we turn to a completely different world, to Mexico and to the mountainous province of Chihuahua. Currently the whole state is overrun by gunmen - protecting rackets in drugs, illegal logging, and extortion. Everyone is under pressure to join one of the local gangs and those who refuse to do so often find themselves ‘disappeared’. At the heart of one of these communities is the parish church of St Francis Xavier, staffed by a group of elderly Jesuit priests.**

**Into its cool shade one afternoon ran a man who was being chased by a man waving a gun. He was a tourist guide and he made for the two priests inside the Church: Javier Campos Morades and Joaquin Cesar Mora Salazar. He crumpled into their arms as the terrorist followed him up the aisle. The two priests were 79 and 80 years of age. The gunman shot all three of them dead. The report goes on: *When a third Jesuit named Jesus arrived on the scene he realised that he knew the man who had shot his Jesuit brothers. And when he said, ‘Calm down’, the attacker hesitated. He looked deeply troubled and did not know how to respond. ‘Is it possible that God will forgive me?’ he asked. Fr Jesus answered, ‘Yes’. The man vanished. Did he ever repent of what he had done? We will never know. What we do know is that something moved within him.***

**In the original Geek the word compassion is described as something that emerges from our guts. It isn’t something intellectual, something we can turn on or turn off, something that affects us only at surface level – some times. True compassion stirs from within our deepest selves.**

**As disciples of Jesus we long for his grace to enable us to have real compassion in the many circumstances in which we find ourselves – not allowing ourselves to be swayed by political prejudice or pride, arrogance or fear. Authentic compassion flows from our willingness to allow the love of God to transform every relationship and every encounter with those we meet – because every day we too walk along the equivalent of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. And every time -as we come across the unexpected – we have choices to make…**