

# Sunday Homily

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

10 JULY 2022

YEAR C

“But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus,  
‘And who is my neighbour?’”

Luke 10:29

### Illustration

One night British writer and broadcaster Libby Purves got out of her new car beside a busy main road, leaving the engine and lights on. To her horror, the car locked itself. Her keys, mobile phone and coat were inside. Commuters rushed past, paying no heed to her waves for help. One battered vehicle did stop. Inside were two rough-looking young women, members of a minor pop band. She asked to be taken to the nearest phone box, but they, concerned at her waiting alone for some time while her husband drove out with the spare keys, insisted on taking her all the way home. In age, lifestyle and outlook they were poles apart. But in a moment of crisis, they were just three women together.

Stories like that provide light relief to newspapers and newscasts. Schoolchildren comfort an elderly person who has fallen, while another calls an ambulance. A teenager dives into a swollen river to rescue someone older. It warms the heart; there’s still good in the human race. But what strikes us most is the contrast between the person in need and their “good Samaritan”. It brings Jesus’ parable closer to home.

### Gospel Teaching

He may have based it on a real event – the road to Jericho was notorious for its bandits. But the characters represented an extreme contrast. Samaritans were religiously and ethnically related to the Jews but accepted only the first five books of the Bible. They had once built a temple on Mount Gerizim to rival that of Jerusalem. Sometimes there was open hostility. About two hundred years before Christ, a Jewish reformer destroyed the Samaritan temple. Sometime between 6 and 4 BC Samaritans scattered bones in the Jerusalem temple, desecrating it. So to orthodox Jews, Samaritans were outsiders, traitors, heretics. They could neither agree to disagree, nor live alongside each other. Most Jews practised a kind of apartheid by taking a long detour to avoid walking on Samaritan soil – a convention Jesus broke.

So the idea of a Samaritan being a good neighbour to a Jew, or a Jew being neighbourly to a Samaritan, horrified the lawyer. He asked, “Who is my neighbour?” because he was looking for a let-out clause which defined “neighbour” as “someone like me”. Instead, he got a spiritual knockout punch.

Jesus laid bare the biblical teaching that all people are neighbours made in God's image. Before God all are equal – equal in dignity, and equal in sin. Colour, class, race and creed are for practical purposes irrelevant. There are no second-class or inferior people, just people, like us. The two great commandments, which the lawyer knew by heart, ruled that wholehearted love for God was to be expressed by selfless and practical love for our neighbour. The two laws were completely inseparable. Break one, and you've broken the other. We are to be like God: he gave himself for us, so we are to give ourselves for others.

## Application

We can feel the lawyer's pain. We also like to choose whom we help and whom we ignore. Like the priest and the Levite in the story, we look for excuses not to get involved. Fear of consequences may be one. Being dragged into more than we can cope with is another. Or we may feel sorry but conclude it's someone else's responsibility to help. But the beggar in the street who needs medical attention is my neighbour even if he does make me late and my car dirty. The noisy, rude and disruptive family down the road whose house is damaged by fire or flood leaving them homeless are my neighbours even if I wouldn't invite them to camp out in my house by choice. Of course, when we see pictures of starving children, we reach for our small change; but it would be more neighbourly to change our way of life so that people everywhere had a fairer deal.

This is not comfortable teaching. But it is not impossible either. Jesus never asked us to do the impossible. We need only the will to obey; he'll give us the strength to act and he'll sort out the complications. And who knows? As we love God with heart, soul and strength and our neighbour as ourselves, others may be drawn to God too. We never know what one good turn can achieve when it's done in Jesus' name. So let's serve him by serving others.