

**Address – 13/11/22**  
**'Remembrance Sunday'**

Luke 10:25-37

"Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29)

The parable Jesus told about the Good Samaritan is perhaps one of the best known of all the stories He told, and with good reason, for it is a story with a message to people of every season in history, to people of every culture across the globe, and to people of every age from the youngest to the oldest. That means it has a message for each of us here today and I hope we can explore that a little in the short time we have together this morning.

Jesus tells the story in response to that question: Who is my neighbour? But it is asked of Jesus by someone who has already thought long and hard about the answer – a teacher of the Jewish Law – and it is asked, we are told, not because the teacher wanted to consider a new angle on the question but because he was trying to trap Jesus and humiliate him publicly. However, Jesus is equally sneaky in telling the story He does because He makes the hero of the story not a teacher of the Law (like the questioner) or a religious leader (who might be looked up to) but instead someone who would have been despised and perhaps even considered an enemy – a Samaritan, that is someone from a neighbouring country, someone who had different beliefs and customs, someone who spoke differently. So at the end of the story when Jesus asks the teacher the same question back: Who acted like a neighbour to the person in need? the teacher can't even bring himself to say 'the Samaritan', he just says 'the person who was kind to him.' And the teacher is left with all his preconceptions turned on their head.

So before we try to work out who *our* neighbour might be, the first thing I would like you to do this morning is to think of who in this world you think little of, or despise, or even consider an enemy. Whether we are conscious of it or not when we think about people we disagree with, or people we have something against or even people who are a bit different from us, we are all guilty of regarding them with suspicion – it might be someone who supports a different team or speaks with a different accent or comes from a different cultural background or faith tradition; it could be someone who has different political views to you or just looks different to you because of their clothes or their body style or their skin colour. And it's very easy to move from suspicion to acting badly towards that person and even considering them an enemy.

Eighty years ago if you had asked people in this country who the enemy was, they would have said Germany or Italy or Japan because of the terrible War that was going on and that had sucked the whole world into a devastating conflict where everybody suffered. I know that it was very hard for a lot of people to let go of that, particularly if they or someone they loved had suffered during the Second World War. Even decades later, my own father found it very hard to have a positive attitude towards Germans even though he had just been a teenager when the War ended, but I'm glad to say that one of my best friends in the whole world is a German and I am very glad indeed to count him my friend.

Forty years ago if you had asked people in this country who the enemy was, they would have said Argentina because of the conflict that suddenly erupted over the Falkland Islands thousands of miles away in the South Atlantic.



Simon Weston is probably one of the most famous faces of the Falklands Conflict. At around 2pm on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1982 his ship, RFA Sir Galahad, was bombed by the Argentine air force and in the ensuing fires 48 men died and 97 were injured, some very seriously, including Simon Weston. He suffered 46% burns to his body and had an agonisingly long and slow journey to recovery. Of all people he had every right to hold a grudge against the Argentinians and yet he chose to meet and has become very good friends with Carlos Cachon, the very Argentinian pilot who dropped the bombs that ultimately caused his injuries. Others have criticised him for that but it is surely an example for us to follow with those we may regard as our enemies today.

There is another example from Argentina that I want to mention this morning. In the early twentieth century Argentina and its neighbour Chile were coming close to armed conflict over a disagreement about the exact line of the border between them. A call went out from Christians in both countries to find an amicable solution instead of going to war, and when diplomacy triumphed and a peace agreement was signed the decision was taken to mark the event by the erection of a statue of Christ the Redeemer.



The statue was transported in pieces by train and then by mule and thousands of people climbed high into the Andes to the newly agreed border for the dedication of the statue. Beneath it, these words are inscribed: "Sooner shall these mountain crags crumble to dust than Chile and Argentina shall break this peace which at the feet of Christ the Redeemer they have sworn to maintain."

Before we answer the question 'Who is my neighbour?' perhaps we have to come face to face with the question 'Who is my enemy?' because the teacher of the Law who asked Jesus the question that day was left having to consider whether someone he had written off as an enemy might actually be the neighbour he was called by God to love. And that is perhaps what we are being called to do this Remembrance Sunday. We rightly give thanks today for those who in times of conflict were willing to lay down their lives in kindness towards those who, like the person in Jesus' story, had been attacked and were in need. But we don't necessarily recognise that some of those who sacrificed their lives were from categories of people who in other circumstances we might simply write off because they were different from us.

We need to recognise that just as God in Christ is ready to forgive us who so often stand in enmity towards God, so when we receive that forgiveness we must allow our attitude towards those we may think of as enemies to change too. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and the second is like it, to love our neighbour as ourselves. How can we say that we love God whom we have not seen if we do not love our brother or sister, our enemy or our neighbour who is right in front of us? For when we let the work of Christ the Redeemer change us we cannot ever be the same again in our attitude and actions towards others, yes, even our sworn enemy.

As the apostle Paul would later write in his letter to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) Let that be what brings all people together that there may be in peace in our time.

Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God.' Jesus said, 'Love your neighbour.' Jesus also said, 'Love your enemy.'