

Views from the Pews – Just passing by

The Good Samaritan parable is worth returning to, if just for its cast of characters. Jesus puts people into his stories for a reason. The Priest and the Levite are in it firstly so He can have a dig at the politico/theological establishment, but secondly for a more important reason relevant as ever to 21st Century life. Let's start with our various Confession formats; it is clear that sin always includes omission as well as commission.

Then pass to a contemporary controversy; Gaza. It is not just Israeli military policy that demands scrutiny – it is the lengths many go to to avoid the subject, to minimize it, to declare that there's nothing we can do about it. Enormous energy goes into passing by on the other side. The same goes for climate change. And the same goes for poverty. We blame the poor for their plight. It is nothing to do with us. Someone else's problem. Much current political discourse is driven by anger at those who pass on the other side, eyes averted.

So this well-known parable is about the true nature of sin; we are invited to condemn not only the robbers, but also those who crossed to the other side of the street to avoid involvement.

We are all tempted to minimise and restrict the word 'neighbour', but Jesus will have none of it; the Jericho-bound traveller is everyone's neighbour. Passing by will not do. By the time you read this it may have been confirmed that some UK clergy were arrested just for defying a government restriction on public protest about Gaza. Being a Good Samaritan involves going outdoors, getting involved and – yes – annoying people at times; if this parable means anything, it is that Christ calls us to action. We must notice the bleeding traveller in the gutter, walk up to him or her, and act accordingly.

The other oft-overlooked character is the innkeeper. Yes, he took money, but he could have refused to take the traveller in. He also believed the Samaritan's promise to cover extra costs. He did not avert his eyes.

This parable is a call to action in our own times; it is far more than a confrontation between Jesus and His critics. The story is less comfortable than we first assume, once we understand that Jesus is talking to us, not just to the crowd around him.

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