

Epiphany 7 All Souls 2025 **LOVE YOUR ENEMIES**

From today's Gospel: Jesus said, "But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you..."

Towards the end of the New Zealand Wars (1845-72), the government troops were encamped at Waikato. They had run out of provisions. The Maoris were firmly entrenched at Meri-Meri and the troops feared an overwhelming attack. Suddenly a few big canoes appeared, and the soldiers rose up out of their camp to defend their position. They discovered that the canoes were laden with goats and potatoes. "We heard that you were hungry" the Maoris explained. "The Book says, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him'. You are our enemies. We feed you. That is all." This was the Gospel in action, changing lives, changing attitudes, changing guns and spears into potatoes and goats.

Such was a small part of the great legacy George Augustus Selwyn, first English Missionary Bishop of New Zealand, left in the Pacific in the nineteenth century. The Maori people were his people. Selwyn appreciated the great value of Maori culture and as a result the Maori people have made a great contribution to the Church. The Anglican Prayer Book of New Zealand is just one fine example of this legacy and many wonderfully unique Church buildings.

Most of us know the famous parable of the so-called 'Good Samaritan'. We often use the expression 'Good Samaritan' when someone goes to the aid of another. 'Good Samaritan Industries' is a big Welfare Group in Perth. The expression 'Good Samaritan' doesn't appear in the Bible. It is a popular invention, rather like the 'Three Wise Men'; there could have been a hundred Wise Men; there were simply 3 gifts. The power of the Parable is completely lost in fact if we use the expression, 'Good Samaritan'. The power of the parable is found in the radical love of an enemy towards another enemy. The man who stopped and cared was from Samaria. Jews detested Samaritans. Associating with them was to make oneself unclean. Ironically, two pillars of religion and society, belonging to the same race as the man who fell among the thieves, walked by on the other side because to even touch this naked, bloody, half dead human being, would have rendered them ritually unclean. And that's just for starters. It would have been beneath their dignity; their standing. Or maybe it was easier, simply to presume he was dead and that nothing further needed to be done; get out of there fast before anyone else sees the avoidance syndrome. No surveillance cameras around in those days. The priest and the Levite were steeped in the 10 Commandments and all the hundreds of other codes laid down in the books of Moses and they wouldn't lift a finger to help.

I remember an account some years ago of a Melbourne lawyer who rushed to the aid of a woman who was being dragged out of a car by a member of the Hell's Angels. With no thought for his own safety, he was gunned down and died

as a consequence of his action. I don't even know if he was a Christian. What I do know is that this man exercised radical love. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says unto me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven". I reckon that lawyer went straight to heaven. I do worry that some religious people may not get a look in. Jesus did too.

If the lawyer had simply 'passed by on the other side', minded his own business, his family would still have a husband and father coming home at night. I'm sure that a good number of Australians would agree that that would have been a better outcome. But he dared to interfere in love. He wasn't a goody-goody, and he wasn't into practicing mediocrity. Neither was the Samaritan in the parable. This action was far more radical than that. It says in the parable that the Samaritan was 'moved with pity' – moved into action – action that broke all the rules. You may remember what I was saying about 'compassion' a few months ago. Real compassion will often take us further than we wished to go – into uncomfortable places, places of risk, places of huge vulnerability.

This, in essence, is the story of the Christ we dare to follow. He didn't come to teach us how to be religious, but to show us how to live. Jesus of Nazareth interfered in his radical love all the way to the cross and he broke a heap of social and religious rules along the way. As we gather today for our Annual Vestry Meeting, let us indeed give thanks for the faith and life of this community of All Souls', and all the wonderful work that is done in God's name in this place and beyond. But let us also ask for the further empowerment of the Holy Spirit to witness and live authentically in our wider community, that we may be a beacon of hope and love, especially to those who may have lost their way in life, or who suffer from the violence and rage that seems to be ever-increasing around us.

Ludulfus of Saxonia in the 14th century penned some beautiful words about the radical love of Jesus:

Always and everywhere have Christ devoutly before the eyes of your mind, in His behaviour and in His ways; as He is with His disciples and when He is with sinners; when He speaks and when He preached; when He eats and when He serves others...How humbly He bore Himself among us, how tenderly among His disciples, how pitiful he was to the poor, to whom He made Himself like in all things; how patient under insult how gentle in answering, for He sought not to maintain His cause by keen and bitter words, but with gentle and humble answer to cure another's malice...How compassionate He was to the afflicted...how ready in serving all, according to His own words, "I am among you as one who serves"...how He shunned all display...how earnest in prayer, how sober in His watching, how patient in toil and in want...