

Sermon for Holy Trinity on Sunday 13 July 2025 – the Fourth Sunday after Trinity – am.

Texts: Deuteronomy 30.8-14; Colossians 1.1-14; Luke 10.25-37

Being fully human

On Friday I visited the major exhibition and conference on AI entitled 'AI for Good' which has been running at Palexpo all this week. As I explored the numerous exhibition stands, I was struck, just in the area of medical care alone, how many AI-based gadgets and resources are now available and the immense potential which they have to help transform people's lives.

However, there were some robots which stirred in me emotions ranging from unease to profound disquiet. One had a mock cat's head and was designed to assist in wards for children in hospital. The other was a robot intended to provide social care and interaction for older people in residential homes. I realised that what was causing me disquiet was the question it raised about at what point do we cease to be fully human when we outsource social care, in particular in how we show love and care, even of our nearest and dearest, to machines?

The central theme of our gospel today is the question. "Who is my neighbour?". However, if we consider our three Bible readings together, I think an even deeper underlying question emerges. This question is, "What does it mean for us to be fully human in the sight of God?" In other words, what would it look like for us to live truly in the way and for the purpose God has created us?".

I believe that we see in our three readings today a gradual progression in finding the answer to this question. That's why I'd like to explore each of them in turn to show how this is the case.

Our reading from Deuteronomy addresses the most fundamental question which is, "How do we know what God's will is for us in our lives?" We may be inclined to think that this is something far beyond our grasp unless we happen to be an immensely learned professor of theology, or something which can only find out after a lifetime travelling the length of the world and trying to distil its wisdom.

But we are firmly told, "No" – this isn't the case. The word of God is nearer to each of us than even the breath of our bodies. It's in our mouth and in our heart". In other words, God's word, God's deepest desire for us is imprinted in our conscience which every human being possesses. However, we have to be willing to listen and to spend our lifetime learning to recognise and observe that word so that we discern what God is calling us to do.

Next, we have to allow the word of God to help us find out how we should apply this in practice in our daily lives. And in St Paul's letter to the Colossians, we see within the context of a small Christian community, how this happens and what it looks like. Paul had been imprisoned in Ephesus as a result of sharing his Christian faith. He was writing to this small, fledgling Christian community in Colossae whom he had never met but of whom he was hearing news. He probably received this news from

Epaphras, whom Paul mentions by name and indeed who may well have been the person who brought the news of Christ to this community in the first place.

What is clear from Paul's letter which is filling him with joy, is that he is beginning to see the signs of God's desire for that community, starting to come to life amongst them. It's not that they have suddenly become highly learned in the scriptures or behaving in an ultra-moral way. Rather what Paul and Epaphras are noticing is the love which members of the community are showing for one another; their mutual care, and kindness. In showing these signs, they are already beginning to bear witness to something very different from the values of their non-Christian neighbours whose lives are often characterised by the values of the Roman Empire itself, rooted in aggression, competitiveness and contempt for the weak and vulnerable.

Paul is all too aware that it is early days for this community, and they are very vulnerable., Who knows how they will cope when major pressures come upon them, whether internally with tensions in the community or externally with threats of persecution. This is why he prays for them incessantly. We also need to note *what* he prays for. He asks God to help them grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding so that they may discern His will.

So Paul isn't praying that they will become cleverer or more learned than their neighbours although this may come in time and they grow in faith. Nor is he praying that they become especially holy although again, this may come as they grow in faith. Instead, by praying that God will help them grow in spiritual wisdom, he is asking God to help them to understand on a very practical basis, how to apply their newly-found faith in all the situations and contexts in which they are facing in their daily lives. We also need to note that St Paul is clear that it is in the nitty gritty of living together as a community that they will learn to love God and also love the outsider. As St John says, "For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen". (1 John 4.20).

Which brings us to our gospel for today which is the parable Jesus tells the lawyer when he asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?". We all know that there is a twist in this parable – an element of the unexpected, even the shocking for it is Samaritan, a member of that community which the Jews loathed and feared who is the hero. He notices, rescues and saves the man beaten up and left for dead by robbers. The priest and the Levite, both respected Jewish religious leaders whom one would have expected to respond, ignore the desperately injured man by the roadside and go on their way.

Not that the priest or the Levite were necessarily bad people. Both may have been religiously devout and indeed they may well have been hurrying on their way to carry out some liturgical office – just as I might hasten to lead a morning Eucharist in church or a service of Choral Evensong. But in contrast to the Samaritan who notices the man, sees his distress, stops, gives him immediate relief and brings him to a place where he receives long-term care until he is well, their failure to act is evident for all to see.

In contrast, what has come to life in the Samaritan in this story, is an instinctive living out of God's will. Here is someone who has not only heard the word of God but has learnt to live his life according to its prompting, whatever the situation and whatever the cost. He has learnt to see the image of God in the other – even in rather a disgusting bloodied and beat up man lying in the dust. He stops, responds with

loving care and brings them to full restoration. The Samaritan points us to Christ himself who will live out God's care for us, by offering his very life for us.

Who is my neighbour? In the past week, it's a very topical question raised in relation to the agreement reached between the British and French governments regarding the sending back of those who arrive in the desperately overcrowded rubber dinghies to England seeking asylum. It's a question which are having to ask within increasing urgency on a global scale, not least here in Geneva as we witness the devastating effect of the recent cuts in international aid and the very real impact of these in the shape of food, health, health, education and advocacy programmes for the world's most vulnerable people, which have been severely reduced or even stopped.

Our Curate Glen went on a visit with the Anglican Communion office to Romania last week and observed at first hand how cuts in aids programme has meant many of those who used to provide counselling and support to those seeking asylum have lost their jobs, and much of the support can no longer be offered. The question which we will increasingly have to face both in citizens of our respective countries and as individuals is how far are we prepared to make sacrifices and put in money to meet this rapidly growing shortfall?

Who is my neighbour? One thing we can think and pray about this week is what does lie within our power to do. For even small actions which we can take, both as a church and as individuals, can make a difference even though they may feel like to drop in the immense ocean of need. That is why one of our priorities this year at Holy Trinity is to reestablish a social action group to look at projects and charities we can support, either through hands-on involvement or by financial support, both here in Geneva and in Switzerland and in other parts of the world. One of the immediate jobs we will be doing is looking encouraging people to suggest projects they think we should support; evaluating these and putting recommendations to Council as to which we might support. So, if you would like to get involved with this, please let me know – your support will be extremely welcome.

The core questions we have been addressing today is 'What does it mean or us to be truly human in the eyes of God?' I think the answer is probably when our hearts of stone have become, through God's grace, hearts of flesh. When we instinctively, like that wonderful Samaritan man, notice, see the image of God in our neighbour, whatever our faith may be, and response with selfless love. It's a very far cry from us choosing to outsource our love and care to a robot. Rather God is calling us, each man, woman and children here today to incarnate and show His deep love and compassion to whoever needs our care.

Amen

Canon Daphne Green