

'The Shocking Tale of the Good Samaritan'

Introduction ...

This famous wicked little tale

Should never have been put on sale

It is a mystery to me

Why loving parents cannot see

That this is actually a book

About a brazen little crook ...

So starts Roald Dahl in his take on 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears.'

It came to mind when I re-read the Parable of the Good Samaritan. What kind of a tale is this?

"Being a '**Good Samaritan**'" is a phrase that's entered common parlance ... it's a well-known phrase in our society ... though a significant proportion of the population would not know that it came from a story told by Jesus.

Domestication ...

And in becoming a common phrase we have 'domesticated' or 'softened' its impact, its message.

We perhaps think of it as a children's story ... but do we omit certain elements ... would we want our children to expect us to stop in a dangerous area – and make them and us vulnerable to attack from whoever had attacked the man in need?

Would we want our children to guarantee – or expect us to guarantee that we'd pay whatever costs were incurred for his treatment – remember – no NHS in that context.

There are some truly shocking elements to this story.

What we might easily overlook ...

But there's one thing in particular that we might easily overlook. This parable, this story, tends to be told to re-inforce that anyone is our neighbour – no matter what nationality or creed or colour ...

Certainly that's there ... which is a considerable challenge in itself ... but to leave it there is to almost have turned the story in a different direction ... as if it's the Samaritan who's injured and the Jew who helps – thinking of Jesus' original audience.

But that's not how he tells the tale.

It's the Samaritan – the member of the despised, ignored, even hated race who is the one showing love ... and the Jewish questioner who is told to go and copy him.

Application ...

So there is an important 'second message' in this parable:

Yes – to widen our understanding of 'who is our neighbour' ...

but also to be startled or surprised into thinking:

'Who can teach us what it is to love our neighbour'?

What can we learn from those who are 'not like us'?

This extra teaching of Jesus can be, could be applied at so many different levels:

In our culture – what does it mean to love our family or friends ... what might other cultures have to contribute?

If we're at younger or middle age – what does some Indian culture have to teach us about respect for and care of the elderly?

If we're at the older end – what does Inuit (Eskimo) culture have to teach us about sacrifice for the younger?

In our justice system – what does the South African Truth and Reconciliation process have to teach us about love for enemies, love for those who have really hurt us?

In our politics – what might this part of the parable say about learning from those of different political persuasions in order to work for the Common Good?

In our Faith communities – which are at the heart of this parable ... alongside increasing in love for and service to those of other Faiths, what could we learn from them too?

In our individual lives – especially in relation to those we feel we have little in common – is God nudging us now to open our hearts to what he could teach us from them?

Amen.