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THE COST OF COMPASSION : a return journey.

From Luke 10: 25-37 - The Good Samaritan

“ The next day he produced two silver pieces and gave them to the Inn Keeper and said: ‘Look after him; and if you spend any more, I will repay you on my way back “ (vv. 35-36).

Introduction: Return Visits.

What is the Spirit saying to us today to explain why this passage in Luke’s gospel was chosen, quite independently of each other, by both Marie-Françoise Lernould and ourselves for our Bible Study at the beginning and near to the end of our wonderful conference ?

Was this chance, a mistake, or good luck, or bad luck - or does this coincidence have some purpose ? Our life experiences suggest that meaning and purpose can rarely be disentangled from apparent serendipity.

We have, it seems, been given a second chance this week to reflect on the personal and financial Costs of Compassion (Kindness) and to walk a second time along that dangerous notorious Jericho Road that descends 1200 metres in 30 kilometres to the Dead Sea. The reckless and nameless traveller was foolish to have walked this way alone down that narrow mountain pass at such risk of violent assault. He got what he deserved, some might say.

We are asked to return, like the Samaritan man, to repeat the journey - emboldened by the new insights that we have each received over the last few precious days.

“ Look after him- and if you spend any more I will repay you on the way back “ (v. 36).

Yet this duplication, and also this ‘retracing of our tracks’ (as with a repeat mountain walk) can be a reminder of *Chronos*, of our aging bodies as well as of the “ Adventure of Living ” when nothing is ever fully repeated and when we can expect fresh insights.

This is our second Medicine of the Person Meeting in the Czech Republic : our first was in Prague in 1993 (hosted by Jaro Krinolahvy on the theme “ What is a Stranger ? ” As with today’s theme on the Costs of Care, that first Prague meeting was resonant with the now topical themes of unwanted migrants, and of racial and other prejudice against minorities (the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans - not even assisting Samaritan women in childbirth).

And now, after so many testing and opportunistic experiences within our work, family and personal domains, we are sharing again in the encouragement and the enabling personal relationships that have helped us over the years as strangers in foreign lands and in search of our roots.

We can clearly recall our first ever evening presentation in Prague (which typically was prepared with limited warning !), when Karin illustrated the conference theme “ What is a Stranger ? ” by first talking in Swedish, which as we naughtily expected (apologies, Gerda) confused the interpreter, and momentarily irritated or intrigued the listeners.

Dramatis Personae

William Barclay in his commentary suggested that we look at the characters in the story that Jesus told.

The reckless and fool hardy *traveller*, whose life style caused his near death experience. Why does he deserve help which could have put the Carer at risk of contamination by a dead body, or to risk death from a second violent assault ?

The *priest* who put his own status and the claims of ceremony over charity. *The Levite* who would take no risks but “ did come to the place ” where the injured traveller was, and so may have seen him more clearly than the priest had done.

The *Samaritan*, a possible heretic, a breaker of ceremonial law and not necessarily a racially different individual. This compassionate Samaritan man may in Jesus’ mind have been a commercial traveller who knew the roads and the hostleries, was certainly expecting to come back and had good credit with the inn-keeper.

The innkeeper and *the horse* seem to have been overlooked in the commentary by Barclay ! Do we too neglect the ambulance service and the care home managers in our thoughts and prayers, we wondered.

Where was the Samaritan on the present day political spectrum ? It was said that Margaret Thatcher, when Prime Minister, quoted the “ Good Samaritan ” story not only as a parable of impulsive, spontaneous humanitarian love but also as an illustration of the market economy, whereby the prosperity of wealth creators (cash to pay in advance for care of the destitute) can trickle down to assist the poor.

The Samaritan can also represent despised people, outsiders whom a Jew would not mix with. Yet he is the one who is not only empathic but also takes practical action. He uses his own resources to help the injured man: antiseptic, “ balm ”, transport, bandage, accommodation, money.

There is reciprocal trust between the Samaritan and the innkeeper about money and care. He will come back with money: the cost of compassion for him was both personal (another risky journey) and also financial (an open ended financial commitment).

Was he in turn to be rewarded by the Inn keeper ? Was his compassion entirely altruistic? Is ours? Does it need to be? We too can be paid to be compassionate; it can be a legitimate management target. But avoiding burn out and wearying of doing good is more likely if the cultural /religious values of the institution are being nurtured - not secularised as is happening in the UK and elsewhere.

Certainly it was a memorable encounter of Jesus with the lawyer. A clash of cultures and values. Perhaps it was an " I-Thou " dialogue, although the story suggests that the lawyer wanted to trick Jesus.

" What must I do to inherit eternal life ? " The answer would have been on his own phylactery - " Read it ", said Jesus, perhaps sensing this was a time to challenge but not to humiliate.

But who then is my neighbour ? A key question from the lawyer, as there was a tradition that a neighbour was a person from your own 'clan' - a fellow Jew. Who is my neighbour ?

My neighbour is someone who will help me when I am in need. My neighbour may not be my friend – my confidant. My neighbour may not be religious. My neighbour is both the helped and the helper. Jesus turned round the question and answered it with the story of the half dead nameless man who was passed by on the other side by the religious authorities who should have been neighbourly.

Who of us has not been on a dangerous path in the mountains (or sitting comfortably in a plane when there is a request for medical assistance) and had to answer the question " Who is my neighbour ? " and " What is being neighbourly ? ". The answer to the question can still haunt us.

Doctors are being urged to be compassionate but are often cut off from the religious traditions from which these values are energised and in part derived - as well as lacking adequate financial resources to deliver the best possible care. Those who do not have this connection with Christian or other supportive religious communities advocate *Intelligent Kindness* based on kinship; whilst others promote compassion by appealing to the idea of the *Doctor as Neighbour* - not, interestingly, the Doctor as Friend.

Some final thoughts

We invite you now to look with us at this painting by van Gogh who, because of his own suffering, had a particular empathy with the Good Samaritan parable. Indeed some have wondered if it was self-portrait. The wounded man has a bandage around his ear, for example, and van Gogh had cut off his own ear. The priest and the Levite are in the far distance.

The Christian community in Notting Hill in our student days - and the equivalent community in Uppsala - were profound early resources for us. We needed compassion and kindness which was not to do with wealth - but was practical kindly acts. Paul Tournier's writings were and are inspirational. He crossed the boundaries of medical practice, psycho-analytic psychotherapy and biblically informed Christian belief. So thank YOU ALL for your loving support over the more

recent years and for maintaining this living and learning experience. These rich experiences are derived from the Spirit of Jesus and from his Body - the Church. You have encouraged us as individuals and as a couple to be better neighbours than we might otherwise have been.

We end with a time of reflection, meditation and mindfulness.

The Notting Hill song : The Jericho Road

Here are two verses from a song. The words and tune were composed by Geoffrey Ainger, a Methodist minister, with an acute social conscience and global awareness. He was one of an ecumenical team in multiracial Notting Hill in central London, when we were strangers and there was no money. The song reminds us of the global costs of compassion and the need to make return journeys.

A man went up on the Jericho Road / He went up all alone / He was beaten up and left for dead / and all his money had gone.

Who is neighbour to this fellow ? / Who'll stop to share his load ? / Who gives a damn for the nameless man/ on the other side of the road ?

The Jericho Road runs through our world / From Cape Town to Notting Hill / And the Christ who told of the nameless man / Is asking his question still.

John Wesley - the founder of Methodism and of John's school in Bath – said : “ Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. As long as ever you can ”.

His Brother Charles, in that great Methodist Hymn “ Love Divine all loves excelling “, includes the line “ Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art. Visit us with thy salvation. Enter every trembling heart “.

“ May we labour without counting the cost and seek no reward other than knowing that we do your will ” (Ignatius Loyola).

For Paul Tournier, this parable was central to his understanding of Medicine of the Person:

“ Thus the doctor who puts himself inside the Biblical perspective, who absorbs the Biblical conception of man, becomes as a result a doctor of the person. He can no longer see man as a collection of cells, but as a spiritual being, called to a personal destiny and endowed by God himself with priceless value. The parables of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15: 3–7), of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32) and of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-37), bear particular witness to God's personal care for every man, but the entire Bible is the reflection of it. ”

(A Doctor's Casebook in the Light of the Bible, p.127)

Thank you. - Tack so mycket for allt.