

Fourth Sunday after Trinity 2019 (14.07.19)

Colossians 1: 1 – 14; Luke 10: 25 – 37

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland have designated today “Sea Sunday.” And this designation “Sea Sunday” has even found its way into the Royal School of Church Music material that our Director of Music uses to inform his choice of music and to ensure there is a thematic coherence to every part of our worship. That’s why this sermon is going to be followed by the choir offering to God on our behalf a rendition of “Never Weather Beaten Sail” by Shephard.

The fatal flaw in all this careful planning is that the Bible readings for today – which, after all, come from a system for using the Bible in public worship which is agreed on by most of the Christian denominations in Churches Together – unfortunately, those Bible readings bear no connection whatsoever to sea faring. If only the Good Samaritan had looked after a sailor who had been set upon by pirates, all would have been

well. But, sadly, Saint Luke overlooked to oblige us in that respect!

Living in a maritime community, though, it is never inappropriate to spare some thought, and some prayer, for seafarers; to remember both the dangers they face and the conditions in which they work. Only this week, I heard a suggestion that foreign workers on North Sea Ferries are paid just £1.83 per hour (plus food and a bed, of course.) I’m not too sure about this because I believe there was a piece about it on Look North. And as unrepentant Wezzies our TV is tuned to receive the Look North that’s broadcast from Leeds rather than Hull, so I didn’t see it.

But, if it’s true, there can be few instances of injustice right under our noses that call for the full force of Christian rectitude to be unleashed against them than that. It seems to me that one of the great advantages of living in Brid is that the Hull-Zeebrugge ferry sets off from just down the road. But if this report is true,

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we may well want to reconsider whether we want our travelling convenience to be bought at the expense of being made complicit with dubiously unethical employment practices.

Which is all very well and good, but doesn't help us unpack Colossians 1 and Luke chapter 10 . . . or perhaps, it does. On the face of it Colossians 1 – our first reading this morning - is all very spiritual and unworldly. It talks about our hope being laid up for us in heaven. It talks about spiritual wisdom and understanding. It talks about us being rescued from this world – or the power of darkness – and being transferred into the kingdom of Jesus. So far as this world is concerned, it seems it is just something to be endured with patience until we can share in the inheritance of the saints in the light that is to come.

But that's being a bit unfair to Colossians 1. Because it says that whilst the Christian life is all about that sort of stuff, it is only about that sort of stuff in so much as

that sort of stuff inspires us “lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.” And what's absolutely clear, from words attributed to Jesus himself, is that the way to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, is to follow the example of the Good Samaritan.

There is nothing otherworldly or spiritual about the parable of the Good Samaritan. The requirements for Christian living made by the parable of the Good Samaritan are nothing to do with being pious and holy. They are nothing to do with immersing ourselves in prayer. They are nothing to do with conducting beautiful and moving acts of worship. All of those things may be important. In fact I'm absolutely certain that they are.

But when the lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus didn't mention any of those things. His expanded answer was all to do with how we live in this world, in the here and now; how we live

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from Monday to Saturday, not just what we do when we bolt on the religious bits to our lives on a Sunday morning: how we work, how we shop, how we vote, how we interact with Facebook (and whether we allow ourselves to be click-bait for prejudiced bigotry,) how we respond to social need and how we react to others. Jesus makes it clear that in our everyday lives.

It's worth remembering that in the parable of the Good Samaritan the priest and the Levite, who crossed over the road, rather than help the man who had been set about by robbers, had good, legitimate, respectable reasons for doing so. They were ritually clean, on their way back from Jerusalem. If they had risked getting blood on their clothes and on their hands, they would have risked becoming unclean. They would have risked being prevented from showing their love and devotion to God. The priest and the Levite weren't hypocrites. They were decent religious people doing what was required of decent religious people. And Jesus turns it all on its head.

He says we ought to risk compromising our religious purity in order to treat other people with dignity – no matter who those people are.

If Jesus was telling the lawyer who spoke to him that a man set about by robbers was his neighbour and was to be loved by him as he loved himself, then it's clear to me that Filipino cabin crew earning £1.83 on the North Sea Ferries are our neighbours today. And when that lawyer identified the Samaritan as the one who had been a good neighbour, and Jesus told him to go and do likewise, it challenges us to consider how we are going to mark this Sunday as Sea Sunday, other than by just saying that our thought and prayers are with the sailors.

Amen.