

SESSION FOUR:
IN ALL MY RELATIONSHIPS

pilgrum

In this session we are looking at how faith in the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit shapes and changes all our relationships.

Opening Prayers

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,

Casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember his promise of mercy,

The promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

LUKE 1.46-55

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Loving God,
shine the light of your gospel
in and through my life each day;
help me to live as a disciple of Christ,
an ambassador for peace,
and a sign of your loving presence in the world.

Amen.

Conversation

What conclusions did you come to about your own giving and generosity? Not just your money but also your time and gifts? How does 'living generously' in response to the God who has given us everything in Christ begin to change our relationship with others, especially those closest to us, but also those we find most difficult or different?

Reflecting on Scripture

Reading

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'²⁶ He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?'²⁷ He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.'²⁸ And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'³⁰ Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands

of the robbers?’³⁷ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’

LUKE 10.25–37

Explanatory note

‘A lawyer’ at the time of Jesus would have been someone who was an expert in the Jewish law so this lawyer would probably have been a scribe, a Levite, a Priest or a Pharisee (i.e. quite possibly someone mentioned in the story!).

The Levite and the Priest may have feared that the man was dead. If they had touched him they would not have been allowed to serve in the temple.

Samaria, which lies between Judea and Galilee, was inhabited by people whose religious roots were the same as the Jews but who had developed their faith differently. There are still Samaritans living in Israel and Palestine but in 2012 they numbered less than 1000.

- Read the passage through once
- Keep a few moments’ silence
- Read the passage a second time with different voices
- Invite everyone to say aloud a word or phrase that strikes them
- Read the passage a third time
- Share together what this word or phrase might mean and what questions it raises

Reflection

RACHEL TREWEEK

Transforming relationships

Relationship is at the heart of who God is.

Relationship is at the heart of who God is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Bible tells a story of a people made in God’s image and made to live in relationship with God, in relationship with neighbour and in relationship with self. The ideal of this relationship is reflected in the creation narratives at the beginning, but it is not long after that we see their first fracturing (Genesis 1–3).

But God is in the business of making all things new. The Bible's closing pages present a picture of creation redeemed and God's kingdom fully revealed (Revelation 21.1–5). God's people are restored to perfect relationship with each other and with their God. This is made possible through Christ's death and resurrection, and as God goes on bringing into being that which does not exist (Romans 4.17), Christ's followers are called to reflect the breaking through of God's kingdom in every relationship. This is rarely easy and always risky. That was true of the Samaritan with a stranger; and it is just as true in our relationships of deep intimacy or encounters with colleagues or friends.

Our pride and deep fear of humiliation and failure can drive us to relate in ways that are neither life-giving for ourselves, nor others. The Samaritan *might* have acted from a selfish motive, such as a need to be needed or to be seen as a hero; or perhaps he was driven by a desire to be special or always to succeed. Yet this story is told by Jesus to illustrate what it means to be a good *neighbour*, and therefore the Samaritan is clearly someone who truly desired the well-being of another. This was costly not only financially but also in terms of time, emotion and risk (a point that would not have been lost on Jesus' Jewish audience, who looked down on Samaritans and had virtually no social contact with them). Here is someone of difference choosing to act in the interest of the other. This is about having the mind of Christ (Philippians 2.1–8).

In short

As Christians we are called to make risky relationships with those who are different from us in the same way as the Samaritan did in Luke 10.

For discussion

- What does it mean to you to be 'made for relationship'? How have your relationships with others made you and shaped who you are?
- And how has your growing relationship with God changed you and shaped you, especially in your daily life and in your other relationships?

Serving others and living with difference

As we grow in personal relationship with Christ and experience the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are called to live relationships that enable mutual flourishing and transformation. And it must be true for all our relationships. Whether it is between close and intimate friends, marriage partners, parents and children or colleagues at work, each relationship is a place of encounter that

Each relationship is a place of encounter.

offers the potential for joy and pain to be shared; for love and trust to grow; for support and for faithful commitment and nurture to be given and received. In this each person in the relationship has the potential to grow more like Christ and

become more the person God created them to be. And the deeper the relationship, such as that between a married couple, the greater the commitment and the greater the potential for growth in Christ-like self-giving and receiving.

This generous love is best revealed to us in Christ's total self-giving on the cross. But vulnerability, commitment and faithfulness are qualities asked of us in every relationship. And there is always the danger that fear and selfishness mean we end up risking nothing, giving nothing away and rejecting or dismissing others. It is this we must guard against. The Samaritan allowed his heart to be moved and this led to an intentional choice to serve another. Seeking the well-being of others is not about being driven by 'should' and 'ought' and is never to be confused with degradation of self or the permitting of abuse.

When Christ takes on the role of a slave and washes the feet of his disciples (John 13.1–15), we read that: 'Jesus, knowing ... that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table' (verse 3). Jesus knew who he was. My love of neighbour will be impoverished if I do not: commit to continually discovering who *I am* in a place of both repentance and hope; dare to hear God's 'yes'; accept God's love and grace in abundance; and grow in understanding of self (1 John 3.1). It is only from this place that I can truly serve others.

Serving others also requires living with difference. We are created in God's image as unique individuals. The concept of being the body of Christ is one that affirms diversity (1 Corinthians 12.12–14) and yet so often when we encounter difference in others we experience fear and threat. In a world that struggles with difference and the conflict that often emerges, Christ's followers have rich treasure to offer when they demonstrate what it means to 'disagree well'.

If the Samaritan and the injured man had encountered each other in the future, they would have still been men with profound differences. However, I like to think that there would have been a bond between them that meant they exhibited respect, trust, love and grace as they remained committed to relationship in a place of difference.

In short

Vulnerability, commitment and faithfulness are qualities asked of us in every relationship.

For discussion

- In what ways do you take Christ-like risk in your relationships?
- What needs to change in order for your relationships to reflect more distinctively the love of Christ?
- How might we love one another better in places of difference?

Journeying On

During this next week reflect more deeply on your closest human relationships and your most tricky human relationships. How are they places where Christ can be known and revealed and where you can grow in Christ-like giving and service?

Concluding Prayers

Jesus, Lord of time,
hold us in your eternity.

Jesus, image of God,
travel with us the life of faith.

Jesus, friend of sinners,
heal the brokenness of our world.

Jesus, Lord of tomorrow,
draw us into your future.

**God of our pilgrimage,
you have led us to the living water:
refresh and sustain us
as we go forward on our journey,
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Wisdom for the Journey

In Christian teaching there can be no double-standards. Whatever is unlawful for a woman is equally unlawful for a man. Men and women were redeemed together for one price, and together have been called into the assembly of the Christian church. With what arrogance or with what sort of conscience do men think they can do with impunity things which are unlawful for men and women equally?

CAESARIUS OF ARLES (c.470–543)

There are four qualities which must be tested in a friend: loyalty, right intention, discretion and patience, so that you can entrust yourself to them securely.

AELRED OF RIEVAULX (1109–67)

One form of gentleness that we should all practise is towards ourselves. We should never get irritable with ourselves, fretting at our imperfections. It is entirely reasonable to be displeased and feel sorry when we have done something wrong, but we should refrain