

The Free Church, Frinton

**Transforming Messages for 2022**

Sunday Morning 4<sup>th</sup> September 2022

‘Back to School Sunday’

by Rev Mark Massey

*Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37*

If you were asked to sum the bible up with one word I wonder which word you would choose; how would you describe the bible in one word? The word I would choose is ‘love’. The bible is all about God's incredible love for you and me; his never stopping, never giving up, always and forever love for each one of us and the whole of his creation. This is the story of the bible from page one right through to the end.

Now it's interesting because, doing the job that I do, I get to talk to a lot of people about God and about faith, spirituality and the ups and downs of life. I meet people who say, ‘I don't think God really loves me, I don't really feel loved by God. I'm not good enough to be loved by God; I've messed up and screwed up. If you really knew what my life was like you wouldn't think that God loves me.’ Maybe you're sitting there today and you're thinking, ‘I'm ignored by God. He doesn't see me, he doesn't know me; he sees other people but he doesn't see me.’ Now that simply isn't true. The bible is a story that tells us that God loves you and me; that he is one hundred percent committed and one hundred percent loving to all that he has made. God will never stop loving you, he never gives up on you, he has always loved you and he always will love you.

The bible is all about God's love and that's really important as we think about going back to school and back into education, whatever that might look like for you today. Maybe you're not going back into education yourself but maybe you know people that are going back. Maybe you work in education or maybe you know people who do. Maybe there's a school just down the road from you and you see the kids going to school every day. Maybe you've got a grandson or granddaughter who's going off to education. The fact that God loves us is important any day of the year, but particularly so at this point of the year as people go back into education which dominates so much of our lives. It's good to know that we are loved by God with a never stopping, never giving up, always and forever love. The bible is all about God's love for you and me and his love is more than just words. God doesn't just tell us that he loves us, the bible says that he demonstrated his love for us by giving us Jesus, and by Jesus laying down his life for us. And isn't that the essence of love? It can't just be words; love needs to be demonstrated as well.

So the bible is all about God's love, but the bible is also about how you and I respond to God's love. You see we've got a choice. When we understand that God is love, and that he loves us, we can choose whether we respond to his love or not. We can choose to ignore his love, to disregard his love, or we can choose, as humans, to say, 'God loves me, so what am I going to do about that, how am I going to respond to that?'

In today's bible passage we read the story of the Good Samaritan. The story starts with a Pharisee saying to Jesus, "*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" (v25) Jesus responds by asking him what he thinks the Law says and the man replies, "*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 love your neighbour as yourself.*" (v27) Jesus tells him that he has answered correctly. In other words, Jesus is saying that in order to inherit eternal life we've got to know that our salvation is about responding to God's love. Don't just say, 'God loves me'; do something about it, respond to it, love God in return and also love others. I love this because what Jesus is effectively saying here is that to respond to God's love and to love God is the same as loving other people. Jesus is equating those two things together and saying that loving God is equal to loving other people; if you love God then you're also going to love your neighbour as well. So loving God with all that we are includes loving people who come across our path, and that's why he goes on to tell the story of the Good Samaritan. He tells a story to show what it means to love God and respond to that love by loving others as well.

Our frontlines are a fantastic place to work this love out in our lives. The places where God places us - our neighbourhoods, our towns, the places where we work and play, the places where we exercise, the places where we're educated - are great places to work out our response to God's love and to love others. You see, God says he wants us to be people who love him with our whole lives (not just part of our lives) wherever we go, with all our hearts, all our minds, all our souls and all our strength. He wants us to love him and to love others.

'Love' is a verb. A verb is a doing word, so 'love' is a doing word - love has activity associated with it - it can't just be something that we say. If we truly love God that's going to be demonstrated; there's going to be something that we do to show it. And if we truly love our neighbours that's going to have activity associated with it as well. Jesus says, 'I want you to choose this way of life - love the Lord your God with everything you are and love your neighbours. I want you to choose to do this; I want you to choose to work this out in your life.'

The Good Samaritan is a great example of this love in action. The story in Luke 10 shows us that we have a choice whether we respond to God's love or not; a choice whether we love God and love others. In the story a man is going down from Jerusalem to Jericho along a really dangerous road and he's attacked by robbers who leave him for dead. Two people walk past to start with, a Priest and a Levite, both

spiritual, godly men who, if asked, would say that they love God with all their hearts, minds, souls and strength and that they love other people too, just as it says in the Law. But what we see in this story is that although they might say those things, although they might hold the belief within them that they truly love God and others, they choose to do something very different - they choose to walk past this man without helping him. Then along comes the Good Samaritan, this character who shouldn't be involved at all, this person who hates Jews and who Jews hate. When Jesus introduced him in the story he would have been booed by those listening, but he's the one who gets involved and helps the man.

Now we might think about the Priest and Levite, 'Well they didn't really do anything wrong, it's not like they beat the man up, it's not like they robbed him and attacked him'. In many ways that's right - they couldn't have been arrested for what they did (or didn't do). If this was a modern day story they wouldn't have been arrested if they had walked past somebody who was lying on the street. They didn't really do anything that's wrong, but Jesus says, 'If you're part of my family, if you're part of my people, if you're part of my church, I want you to be different. I want you to be a people of love; I want you to stand out from the crowd. I don't want you to walk past when you see someone who needs help. Love is more than words; love is a verb; love needs to be worked out in practice. Loving me means also loving others; not just saying it but demonstrating it as well, it requires action.'

The Samaritan knows that love is a doing word, he knows that love needs to be worked out, and so he shows his love well in lots of different ways. Firstly, he stops in quite a dangerous place. He doesn't know if the robbers are still around but he stops and gives the man his time, even though it risks his own safety. Then he uses his own wine and oil, things which would have cost quite a bit of money, to clean and soothe the man's wounds. Then he bandages the man's wounds, probably tearing up some of his own clothes to make the bandages, and then he puts him on his donkey to take him to an inn where he takes care of him, costing him more time and money. Not only that but he then gives two days wages, two denarii, to the innkeeper to cover the cost of looking after the man until he gets well and says, 'I'm going to return and will reimburse you for any extra expenses you may incur'. This man is incredible! It's an incredible demonstration of what it means to love our neighbour; of what it means to love God and honour him.

This Samaritan was on his frontline, just where God had taken him. He saw that someone needed help and he demonstrated his love for God and others with action; he knew that love was a verb. So what's this got to do with you and me when we think about our own frontlines - in particular, those of us going back into education? In whatever sphere that is, God is going to bring people across our paths that need us to show them love - not just for us to say that we love God or that we care for them but to actually demonstrate our love for them. Now hopefully it won't be that someone's been attacked or we're going to see people by the side of the road, but

there's going to be other ways in which God wants us to care for people on our frontlines, whether that's in an education setting or somewhere else.

Just last week when I was on holiday, God brought somebody across my path who needed some help and there was just this nudge from the Holy Spirit within me saying, 'They're your neighbour, go and help them.' I was able to demonstrate that God loves them by reaching out and helping them and God will do the same through you. There will be people that God brings along your path to whom you can demonstrate his love and care, we just need to be listening for God's prompting and willing to reach out in love to help. Let's not be like the Priest and the Levite saying, 'I love God and I love other people', but then ignoring people around us when they need help; let's be a Good Samaritan and take his example. Let's not ignore those people that God brings along our path but let's reach out and love them and show them what God is like.

Another way of reading the story is that Jesus is the Good Samaritan and you and I are lying beaten up by the side of the path. We have been beaten up by life, beaten up by the sin in our lives, and we're helpless, unable to help ourselves. Jesus doesn't walk past and ignore us, he's done something, he's reached out and grabbed hold of us, he's changed our lives and saved us. He's given up his life, spent whatever it cost, to save our lives and in response to that he says, 'Go and do the same; go and help others on your frontlines.'

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 speaks into this for us, "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*" Those of us who know God have been the recipients of his love and comfort in our lives, and that's not just to make us feel warm and fuzzy inside, although it does! This verse tells us that we've been comforted in all of our troubles, "*so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God*". As I said earlier, the big story of the bible is about God's never-ending, never giving up, always and forever love for each one of us. He's poured that love into our lives and he's comforted us with that love so that we can go and show that same love to other people. That's the story of the Good Samaritan and that's the challenge for you and me today.

So when you're on your frontlines this week, whether that be in an education setting or somewhere else, seek to love and comfort others with the same love that God has shown you. Let's help and support others just as the Good Samaritan did. Let's not just tell people that we love them, or that God loves them, let's show them that love and see God's kingdom grow as we do.