

Thought for the Day. 2nd July 2020

Good morning, Friends.

When I arrived to take up my third ministerial appointment, in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, the Town had just appointed its' new Mayor, a Christian woman, who was very keen to unite the Town in every possible way.

She decided to hold a "Faith Day." The idea was that a representative from every Faith in H. Wycombe would be appointed, and that person on that day would go onto the Town Hall stage, and do a presentation of some poignant story or event taken from the Holy Book of their Faith. I was appointed to be the Christian representative.

I chose the Parable of the "Good Samaritan." My reason for this choice? Because it is applicable to every Faith, and none. This Parable of Jesus contains a valuable message for everyone, regardless of faith, creed, race or gender. We are each called to be a good neighbour, and our neighbour is anybody and everybody.

I am a Methodist for many reason, not least of all because it was in a Methodist Church that I met the risen Christ on Easter Day, where I sat waiting for my little boy to finish in Junior Church so that I could collect him and take him home at the end of the service. I didn't belong there. I was a professed Atheist, but I had nothing better to do, and took communion because everyone else was doing it. As I turned to go back to my seat, I felt the presence of the Lord Jesus, standing at my side. I left the service a converted Christian, and the rest is history.

But there are other reasons why Methodism, rather than any other denomination appeals to me. When I was a child of about nine or ten, my Sister and I looked out of our living room window on Christmas Eve, with great excitement. Across the road stood two younger children, Peter and Freda, watching the body of their Mother carried out of their house by a funeral company. Peter and Freda were not excited. They were heartbroken and devastated.

Over the coming weeks, their home changed from a loving home to a hovel. Their Father, in his grief, turned to drink, and their home became squalor. The children ran around in rags and everything fell apart.

The neighbours gossiped and past by on the other side. Noone came to the family's aid. All, that is, except a group of women from the local Methodist Church. They did something different. They formed a rota. Every single day, one or other of them would turn up at Peter and Freda's house, bath the children, give them breakfast, get them to school, and then set about cleaning their house. "A bunch of interfering busy bodies," their Father called those women, but he was usually too hung over to care what they did, so he didn't try to stop them.

This went on for some months. In the end, the women actually persuaded the Father to get help for his addiction, and they managed to keep the Family together between them, so that Peter and Freda didn't get taken into care.

Freda had been attending all the practices for the S. School anniversary. One of those big annual events when all the little girls used to be dressed in white, and the boys with pure white shirts paraded round the streets and then stood on the platform in the church singing hymns and songs in three services on two Sundays. Freda knew every song by heart, and desperately wanted to be on that platform, but she had no white dress, or anything she could wear.

A few Sundays before the big day, Mrs. Weaver, a kind but formidable woman, went round the congregation with her tin. Now when Mrs Weaver rattled her tin, you didn't argue. You placed your money into it. The following Saturday, Mrs. Weaver arranged with Freda's Dad to go and collect her, and take her shopping. This was all done on foot. She had no transport, and lived a couple of miles from Freda, but a beautiful white dress, white sandals and socks, hair ribbon and cardigan were purchased and kept at Mrs. Weaver's home for now.

On the anniversary day, Mrs. Weaver walked two miles to collect Freda, take her home, bathed her, washed her hair and fed her, and took her to church, (three times in one day). Freda stood on that platform and glowed. She looked absolutely beautiful and sang her heart out. There had even been enough money, apparently, to get Peter a smart new shirt and trousers, and he watched from the pews.

Over the coming months, their Father gradually changed back to the loving Dad he had once been and their home life was transformed. I still find tears filling my eyes when I look back to that series of events, and I have often prayed, "Lord, make me an interfering busybody for you."

In Luke 10. vv 25 – 37, we hear Jesus asking, “who is my neighbour?” Which of the three men in the story is my neighbour? Was it the Priest who passed by on the other side, having seen the poor man lying in the road, beaten and bleeding and helpless. Was it the Levite, who pretty much did the same? Or was it the foreigner, the hated Samaritan, who took pity on the victim and saved his life? We all know the answer to Jesus’s question.

I think my presentation of that Parable on that Faith Day in H. Wycombe went down well. I pray that it challenged those of all Faiths and none. It certainly continues to challenge us in this generation, as in all generations.

Let us pray:-

Loving God, we pray that you will continue to teach us to be good neighbours to those we meet, and to those whom we may never meet. We pray for all in need at this time, and especially those who fall prey to addictions of all kinds. May they find the strength to seek the help they need. Show us how we can help. We pray for homeless people in this Country and overseas, for refugees and asylum seekers and their children. We remember before you the hungry, and helpless, the victims of war and oppressive regimes. We pray for all who are lonely, especially at this time of Pandemic, and for all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Through us, heal their hearts and minds. Make us instruments of your healing and peace. Make us busybodies for you. Enable us by the power of your Spirit, to look beyond the squalor, the head lice, the rags and the smell of the beer, and to see only one of your children in need. Just as the Samaritan in your story, saw beyond the blood of the victim lying in the road. Fill us with compassion and make our hands become your hands, our voices become your voice, and our feet become your feet, that we may serve our brothers and sisters as a neighbour should do. And so may your Kingdom come and your will be done. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.

The hymn I have chosen is “When I needed a neighbour, were you there?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ym8yOdCFGpc>

This hymn can be found on Youtube, sung by many different individuals and groups, so you might wish to listen to several versions, or select. In Sthe F it is hymn number 256.

Rev. Jean Holyhead.