**Wounded & Abandoned**

**The Parable of the Good Samaritan through an Intergenerational Lens**

Sermon for Cashmere Presbyterian Church, Sunday 17th July 2022

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**Text: Luke 10: 25-37**

**Introduction:**

Today I want to look at this parable known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan through intergenerational lens. There are 3 key observations that set up where I want to go today:

1. At the centre of this passage is a *question about ‘life’*. It begins with a question from a lawyer – ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

He is referring to fulfilling life, now and forever. What the Jews captured in their greeting ‘Shalom’, a fullness and wholeness, a flourishing and aliveness that is for now and forever, freed from the tarnishing effect and impact of sin. Jesus highlights this in the second reference to life when he says that if you keep these commandments to love God and love your neighbor then ‘you will live’.

The third reference to life is related to the man who falls among thieves – he is lying on the side of the road, ‘half-dead’. That is, he is not full of life, robbed of that he lies abandoned and life ebbing out of him!

This is a clear compare and contrast: ‘eternal life’ compared to ‘being half-dead’.

It reminds me of the compare and contrast that exists in the John 10 passage about Jesus as the good shepherd which culminates in John 10:10, where Jesus says:

*“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life,
life in all its fullness.”*

Again compare and contrast, between Jesus who comes to fill out our lives with love and meaning, purpose and hope, *and* the things that rob us of life!

I am reminded of a line from a favourite song, Carol King’s ‘You’ve got a friend.’

“People can be so cruel sometimes.

They’ll take your soul if you let them”

Compare that to the other great shepherd passage in the Bible, Psalm 23:

“The Lord is my Shepherd….

He restores my soul.”

1. Another key image in the story is *the road,* surely a metaphor for the journey of life. In this case, it is a road with a dramatic and dangerous drop. Jerusalem is 2,300ft above sea-level, the Dead Sea, near which Jericho stood, is 1,300ft below sea-level. In 20 miles, the road drops 3.600ft.

It represents symbolic descending into dangerous territory, liable to rob you/us of the heights of life’s experience.

1. Finally, by way of introduction to what I want to say today, the commentator Robert Capon claims *the parable is misnamed!* The focus of the story is not the ‘good Samaritan’, but rather the ‘man who fell among thieves.’ This, then, should be ‘The Parable of the man who fella among thieves.’ *This* suits my take on the parable because I want to focus on this man who descends into dangerous territory, where he is robbed of life – left, in fact, half-dead.

Given this background, that this is about life, it is about what robs us of life, and placing the focus on the man who fell among thieves, I want now to look at the passage through an inter-generational lens. Given my Moderator theme of Empowering Generations, I find myself drawn tot his way of seeing scripture. So…..

1. **Who is ‘the man who fell among thieves’?**

My first thought is that the ‘man who fell amongst thieves’ represents the *Millennial generation*. This is the generation that is now aged between 23-38 (born 1981-1996). I know this generation well, having worked with them for years as Chaplain at St Andrew’s College and having 3 millennial children.

As a generation, they are struggling with life, experiencing high levels of anxiety and depression. Horizon Health News website reports:

*‘Before the pandemic, nearly one third of millennials reported mental health or substance abuse problems, a rise of 43% in just 5 years. Then the pandemic arrived and the crisis became worse, with around one half of people in this generation reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression.’*

This is backed up by an article in The Weekend Press last Saturday entitled ‘How anxiety has frozen a generation’, the sub-title:

*‘Throw together a pandemic, cost of living and housing crises and climate change – along with online trolls – and you get a ‘tsunami’ of anxious young adults.’*

So, according to The Press, the blows that have hit this generation, leaving them on the side of the road half-dead, are pandemic, cost of living, housing crisis, climate change and online trolls! To that I would add some bigger trends that are robbing this generation of life:

1. Materialism: there has been a steady and yet relentless emphasis on money and things as the secret of a good life, increasingly pushed at us by sophisticated social media algorithms. And yet the reality is that this route to life and happiness routinely leaves people feeling strangely empty and unfulfilled. In Sunday’s Star Times last wee the lead article was on happiness, reporting that while money is important especially for people who have less, it is not as important as it is thought to be for happiness.
2. Secularism: there has been a huge movement away from religious adherence amongst the millennial generation. They are hugely represented in the dramatic rise in the category of ‘no religion’. This is backed up by research reported in the likes of David Kinnaman’s ‘Un-Christian’ and David Seel’s ‘The New Copernicans”, that report statistics like:
* 8 out of 12 millennials have a negative impression of church and church-goers, who they tend to see as arrogant, judgmental and hypocritical.
* 80% of young adults who make it right through youth group to the end of high school have dropped out of church 2 years later.

Whilst this is US research, it is consistent with what NZ researcher Luke Furborough as discovered in the NZ context.

This quote from ‘Jesus the Great Philosopher: Rediscovering the Wisdom Needed for a Good Life’ is telling:

*‘We are now in a secular age, an age where neither the polytheism of the ancient Greeks nor the monotheism of the Christian world holds sway. The result is that it is hard to find meaning, to figure out how to live a meaningful life. We humans are in an existential crisis. Nihilism – the understanding that nothing really matters – is the air we breathe in the modern secular age. Humans in the west live in a psychological space where old structures, both pagan and Christian, have broken down and been replaced by a scientific understanding of the world. This enables us to send a probe to Saturn, but find it difficult to live meaningful lives.’ (Jonathan T Pennington)*

And yet, there are also signs that, while millennials have largely abandoned organised religion, they are ‘haunted’ by a sense that there is something more to life.

1. Individualism: there is a huge emphasis in millennial culture on self-help, with a $10billion industry in self-help books in the US alone! And yet, at the same time, startling reporting about isolation and loneliness afflicting this generation.

This generation, who are our children and are raising our grandchildren, are battered by such things as these, robbed of fullness of life as a result., lying by the side of life’s roadways half-dead.

I think their situation aligns with what Jeremiah said centuries ago:

*‘They have forsaken me, the spring of living water,*

*and have dug their own cisterns that do not hold water.’*

*Jeremiah 2:13*

1. **What does it mean to be good neighbours to this generation?**

The first on the scene were, in close order, the Priest and the Levite. They represented the institutional religion of the day. And there was a huge disconnect between hem and the needs of the battered man!

Their reality was that if he was dead and they touched him, they were ritually unclean and would have to isolate for 7 days – huge barrier here.

*But* I also wonder if the man would have really wanted their help? They had a reputation for oppressing the ordinary person with all their petty rules and judgmental attitudes and hypocritical lifestyles. Maybe he was actually thinking ‘don’t come near me.’

This mirrors the Church and the battered millennial generation – there is a disconnect driven by both sides. Our baby boom and builder generation culture doesn’t connect with millennials! At best, they see us as quaint, at worst, they don’t want a bar of what they perceive as judgmental, arrogant, hypocritical religion!

So, how do we transform ourselves into the good Samaritan in the story, the one who does facilitate a return to fullness of life to the half-dead man? These things come to mind from the story:

1. *Stop, look, listen for the heartbeat.*

For us, this is about stopping to genuinely engage with what makes this generation tick. To hear their story. If we stop we will hear things like:

* + - Longing for more meaning – the haunting feeling there is more to life.
		- Disillusionment with the ability of organised religion to deliver this.
		- A creative right brained approach to seeking truth that encourages doubt, questions, both/and answers (as apposed to either/or answers) and looks for truth through art, music, movies, stories, rather than rational sermons that seek to convince. David Seel in the New Copernicans says: ‘They do not want their pastors to be certainty machines”
		- A deep desire for social justice, expressed in climate action, acceptance and celebration of human diversity regardless of race, creed or sexuality.
		- A craving for meaningful relationships and networks that care and support.

These are the heartbeats of this generation.

1. *Commit to doing what is necessary to heal the battered and bruised man/generation.*

The Samaritan took time to tend the wounds, used his own donkey, spent his own money.

The question then becomes, knowing the issues and where the disconnect is, can we baby-boomer, builder generation Christians and churches provide a healing space where the millennials can reconnect with meaning and life in its fullness?

What would that look like? Lots of soul-searching, openness to change, pivoting to new ways of being church, handing over leadership wherever possible – just like the help offered by the Samaritan, it will be a time consuming, costly thing that will take us off our own ‘course’.

And what about the Inn, the place of healing. Could this be our churches – what needs to happen that they become places of deep, life-giving healing for these younger generations desperately looking for this? Places of genuine intergenerational hospitality and healing?

A challenging and confronting situation, for us as it was for the Priest, Levite and Samaritan; may we continue to grapple with what it means to be the Samaritan in this generational narrative.