

I know nothing about sport. My observation, however, is that there are basically two types of fan- whatever the game may be- those who are loyal to a particular individual, club or nation and those who will always favour the underdog. So there will be those devastated by Murray or Williams or Radacanou's fall from grace at Wimbledon, and there will be those who favour Iceland in the womens' football this weekend. (End of sort knowledge)

It is worth pondering perhaps, whether this division is transferable to other parts of our human experience? Are we divided into those who will always favour the known, the tribe we are part of

and those who will always support the outsider, the vulnerable?

Probably. But I don't think we should treat the story of the Good Samaritan like that. It's not a simple dichotomy, either or; good cop, bad cop message, it's not black and white. Yes, its thrust is clear- it is about doing the right thing, it is about acting compassionately- knowing that loving the neighbour will involve risk, trouble, expense, resources, energy, emotional investment.

This story which we know so well, is not fundamentally anti-clerical, that is directed against the clergy (well, I would say that wouldn't I) but honestly I don't think it is. The priests and Levites

were simply fulfilling their rostered duty, they were predominantly small holders, tenant farmers, who just came up to Jerusalem to fulfil family obligation in the temple once in a blue moon. They were certainly not akin to any sense of a contemporary clergyperson. The priests and the Levites, after all, couldn't risk touching a potential corpse lest the whole temple edifice crumble in the face of a breach of purity laws.

Equally it is clear that the Samaritan in the story is not painted as a do-gooder, in any perjorative sense, nor is he what we might come to think of as 'neighbourly'.

No- in the drama of this story he is a radical. He is rather- deliberately and knowingly- breaking a strict taboo, going beyond, indeed, defying all obligation.

Indeed, Jews and Samaritans interpreted a crucial part of the Leviticus law fundamentally differently, each believing that the neighbour applies only to within their own community. The great achievement of this story is to explode this understanding- and make this fresh and devastating interpretation of the command universal.

Yes, this story radically reinterprets what it means to be a neighbour. But there is perhaps yet more. Let's go back to our two types of sports fans, the one loyal to the tribe, the other championing the underdog. The first are rather akin to what philosophers call utilitarian- those who believe that the end justifies the means, anything goes as long as it is the best outcome for your tribe or interest.

The latter, the underdog-supporters always take up the cause of the weaker or more vulnerable because it seems the right, the moral thing to do. And this weekend, after such a turbulent week in our nation's political life I make no judgement, but suggest we consider this moral law of doing the right thing, rather than the utilitarian thing- for all of us, not just our political masters.

Perhaps there is a something here not a million miles away from the Good Samaritan story, which is about the way in which we are prepared to open ourselves to God's invitation. Our reading from the Old Testament, from Deuteronomy, suggests that in

keeping the laws of God we shall be blessed -
'abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings'
says the writer. This has led to what is sometimes
called the prosperity Gospel- if we are rich it is
because we have earned God's favour, and the
other way round, If we keep the Law we shall enjoy
God's favour and gain in all manner of prosperity. It
could be seen as a simple matter of cause and
effect- and that interpretation is the sort that we
might hear in tele-evangelism.

But it isn't Christian- it is not the way of Christ. No-
this revolutionary drama, which Jesus narrates and
we've come to call the Good Samaritan, explodes
such a false doctrine and shows that this loving of
one's neighbour is not about gaining points on the
Christian journey, not about establishing any sort of

moral superiority, or favouring the underdog, but rather about living in a way which proclaims mutuality of love and generosity.

We have been blessed in this parish by a recent development, the growth in the number of refugees who have found a home here. IN our case, refugees from Egypt and from Iran. These have been people of huge vulnerability. It has been an honour to travel with them in their need- but it has also been hugely important to us, who take our faith perhaps rather inconsequentially, lightly, comfortably, to have reflected back to us, the seriousness of faith, the cost of faith, the risk of faith. We have been blessed indeed to have our need to grow in faith and loving, generous practice awoken and challenged.

So are we going to be like those loyal tribal fans for whom 'Blue is the colour', or Radicannouu is the future hope, or are we going to be favouring the cause of the one who has been attacked and left beaten at the side of the road. Surely, this drama of the Good Samaritan teaches us that we don't have to choose- but we do have to explode the myth with this radical love of Jesus, that everyone is my neighbour- and so Go and do likewise.

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