

Readings for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

13th July 2025

First Reading: Amos 7:7-17

This is what the LORD showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb-line.' Then the Lord said, 'See, I am setting a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land."'

And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.' Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac." Therefore thus says the LORD: "Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parcelled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land."

Second Reading: Colossians 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' 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.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' 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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 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. 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." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

A Reflection for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

In April 2023, Kirsten Neuschäfer won the 2022 Golden Globe solo, round-the-world yacht race. She was the first woman to win such a race and, of seventeen starters, was one of only five to complete. Her victory was all the more remarkable in that, part the way through, she diverted from the race to rescue a fellow competitor. The race started in France in September 2022 and, in November, having rounded the Cape of Good Hope and some 450 miles off the coast of South Africa, Tapio Lehtinen's boat sank. He was in second place at the time. He spent more than 24 hours adrift in a life raft in the Southern Ocean before Neuschäfer, who was more than 100 miles away at the time of the accident, but still the closest vessel, reached him. She took him aboard and then transferred him to a cargo ship that had also diverted towards the scene, before resuming her race.

Her story is not unique. In round-the-world yacht racing, competitors are often hundreds, or even thousands, of miles from land, and far from main shipping lanes, and the other competitors may be their only hope of rescue when something goes catastrophically wrong. And they do so. They are the maritime equivalent of today's Good Samaritan for each other, and there is no passing by on the other side. They recognise that the regions that they sail in are wild and dangerous – those latitudes of the Southern Ocean are not called the 'roaring forties' and 'furious fifties' for nothing – and one day they might need the same help.

Today's Gospel parable of the Good Samaritan is, perhaps, one of Jesus' best-known parables. It is the first of many parables in this central section of Luke's Gospel which Jesus tells as he journeys from Galilee to Jerusalem.

We are told that a lawyer, so an expert on religious matters and particularly the Jewish Law, seeks to test Jesus. At this stage in Jesus' ministry, this was probably not a malicious attempt to catch him out but more to test his credentials. So he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus turned the question around on him; he was the expert after all, and asked in return 'what is written in the law?' He answered as the Law demands, '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.’ So far, so good, but the lawyer tried again ‘and who is my neighbour?’ This was actually a question about boundaries that asked, ‘where can I draw the boundaries, the limits, around what God asks of me’. The parable was Jesus’ response, and it is a challenge – in God’s kingdom there are no boundaries.

We all have boundaries and rules that we live by, even if subconsciously. In the Jewish culture of Jesus’ time, there were rules about how men should treat women, and *vice versa*, about how parents should treat children, how Jews should relate to foreigners, and Samaritans, and so on. It established a social order where certain positions of power and privilege were maintained. It was those rules and boundaries that, in the parable, led to the priest and the Levite passing by on the other side without offering help. As you probably know, Jews and Samaritans were hostile to one another and wouldn’t normally associate, which made it all the more shocking that it was a Samaritan who had mercy on the man who had been attacked; it crossed the accepted boundaries.

Our society today also has a social order, there are positions of power and privilege, and places where some people feel they do not belong. It is not so different. And that is what Jesus challenged. In the parable, it was the Samaritan who transcended those societal norms, who looked with compassion on the man who had been attacked as a fellow human being, and addressed his needs in very practical ways. The parable reminds us that reading and knowing what God asks of us is not enough, we are also called to respond in active and practical ways. Jesus’ challenge to the lawyer, and to us, is to ‘go and do likewise’.

The Rev’d Canon Angela Tilby is Canon emeritus of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and a writer and broadcaster. In a recent column in *The Church Times*, she wrote that our society and politicians are ‘wedded to the secular dogma of individual autonomy. This assumes that I have an absolute right to fulfil myself as far as I can’. She said that recent proposed changes to legislation in the UK, including that on assisted dying, reflect that assumption that we have the right to do as we wish, but disregards any idea of ‘mutuality, obligation and personal restraint for the sake of others’. She may be right about the legislative approach ignoring our responsibilities to others, but I am not sure I see this reflected in society more generally. However, she continues by saying that the church has a different model of inclusion, of people belonging together despite our differences. I am not sure that is unique to the church either, but the Good Samaritan exemplified that.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses the familiar metaphor of the church being one body with many parts, each having its own role, a metaphor that the church extends to the whole community. Tilby argues that what she calls the church’s model is a healthier one for society, and I think that few people would disagree, whether people of faith or not. We should recognise that our choices affect others, and that our duty and obligation to others should sometimes override our personal preferences.

Round-the-world sailors like Kirsten Neuschäfer, and indeed seafarers all other forms of marine endeavour, understand that well. They never know when they might be called upon to go to the aid of another seafarer; and they go, in part, because they also never know when they might need similar help. The same should be true for us: we should also be always willing to help. Not just because we never know when we may be in need of the assistance of others, but because it is the right thing to do, to love our neighbour as ourselves.

In today's passage from the letter to the Colossians, Paul and Timothy pray that the people 'may lead lives worthy of the Lord ... as [they] bear fruit in every good work'. Being a neighbour to others, being merciful to those in need, being a good Samaritan isn't a one-off event, or even a series of events. It's a way of being, a way of living our lives, as our characters are shaped by actively loving God, loving our neighbour and loving ourselves, so that we do, indeed, bear fruit in every good work.