

## The Good Samaritan

Today's gospel reading will be familiar to many of you. It is an iconic story that has inspired millions throughout the ages to do good. To love God and to love one's neighbour through practical action.

Today, however, in the light of the gospel and in light of the events of this last week, I would like to reflect and focus on three key things that will help many of us who have been deeply affected by the death of Sam Carson.

Firstly, the beauty of compassion.  
Secondly, the respect for difference.  
Finally, the importance of faith.

It has been a truly heartbreaking week, and all our thoughts and prayers are with Kay and Jasper and the family at this difficult time. As well as being deeply affected, I know so many of you have showered them with your love and care, support and prayers, and they are so very grateful. They have told me how they have felt enveloped in love.

What Kay and Jasper have had to deal with this last week is the stuff of nightmares. No parent should ever have to lose a child, it is incomprehensible. There is nothing to say.

And so a footnote before I reflect on those three things - compassion, difference and faith. My first thought, my first instinct as I read the Good Samaritan again, is why was this man robbed, and left half dead. Why does bad stuff happen in life? Why is there evil in this world? Why does God allow such suffering, and such pain? Just as the road to Jericho was beset with difficulty and danger, why do we find our life journeys beset with such pain and loss?

Now before you switch off, or get angry, please don't: I assure you I'm not going to try and explain away or defend the indefensible, with some insensitive theological arguments. I don't claim to be any great intellect, but I have read theology at both St Andrews and Cambridge, and I have yet to come across an intellectual response to the problem of suffering that satisfies.

But in the light of this story, and in the light of this last week, for me, the question 'why?' is the wrong question. It is a question that is ultimately unanswerable. May I suggest our concern, our focus in the light of the gospel and in light of Sam Carson's death must be how? - How can we build and rebuild a community that is able to absorb such pain and suffering, and at the same time enable people to live lives of faith, and hope, and love, even in the midst of such loss.

Three things:

First of all, like the Good Samaritan we need compassion. One of the things that has struck me this last week is how people have longed to be with Kay and Jasper and the family, have longed to communicate to them in whatever way they can, that they care and that they are thinking of them. Whether it be phoning them, texting them, writing to them, visiting them, dropping off food and drink, looking after Clara or Petra - people have responded with real compassion.

I must relay the story of Yr 4. Clara's class - a class of 8 and 9 year olds were told on Monday by their teacher Suzi Waddington of Sam's death. And Evie one of the class, and a good friend of Clara's rushed home and said to her mum Cathy - 'I need to tell Clara how much I love her! I need to text her.'

And when I was with Kay and Jasper the following day, they told me how Clara had been playing on her ipad when Evie's message came through. It meant a great deal to Clara and to her mum and dad. And the school have set up a forum for Clara, in which her friends and classmates can send her their support. Clara has responded to every message.

And in the story of the Good Samaritan, although he is the first to respond, the Good Samaritan recognises he needs help too, and goes to the innkeeper. And so as we respond and show our love and support to the Carsons, let's not forget to show our love and care for one another. Such tragedy and loss will take its toll on each and everyone of us, and we must show compassion and patience with each other. We all deal with things differently. And this brings me to my next point - difference.

Secondly, we need to respect difference. I went with Kay and Jasper and the girls on Wednesday to a memorial service for Sam at his college Sir John Deane's. It was truly beautiful. Sam's friends and fellow students had created a montage of pictures and funny stories and memories relating to Sam, and his girlfriend Dana sung a lullaby, that was both heartbreaking and inspiring. The Principal gave a tribute, there was a reading from a teacher, I said a prayer and then Jasper remarkably stood up and was able to say a few words to thank the college for all that they had done for Sam.

But one of the things that I shall never forget from that day is what happened after the service. Because after tea and biscuits we were taken to NOOB. Room N008.

Sam was a founding member of NOOB - room N008. Now NOOB was created at the request of Sam by the college for people who wanted to be and chose to be different - it was a safe place for them to hang out and find friendship - and in the words of one student, 'a place where you could leave your stuff, and it wouldn't be nicked!'

And as we stood there in that place, something very special began to happen. Sam's friends began to tell Kay and Jasper stories about Sam, stories of their son they had never heard before, but stories that were

healing. One after the other, they spoke of Sam offering love and support to people who were different. Sam didn't categorise people, everybody was of equal value, there were just different sets of categories.

And for the Good Samaritan difference does not get in the way. The man lying on the roadside may be different, so what, he needs help and support.

And for us, may we never be afraid or intimidated by difference. Rather may we see each and everyone as a beloved child of God. And may we learn to live with difference: different attitudes, different beliefs, different priorities, but putting each other's different needs before our own. Like the Good Samaritan, Jesus encourages his disciples throughout the gospel not to meet people from a place of superiority, nor even equality. But from a position of vulnerability. Putting each other's different needs before their own.

Finally, we need to have faith. Faith in God, faith in each other, and faith in ourselves.

What has struck me most about Kay and Jasper this last week is their resolute and defiant faith. Despite their great loss, they have displayed such a strong and unwavering faith. Now I've no doubt they will experience times of doubt and despair, nevertheless they are determined to get through this and it is their faith that is getting them through. They speak of God's love and God's providence, in the face of such confusion. They are showing great care for and trust in each other, in the face of such agony. They are so grateful for all the love and support that has been shown to them - it has restored and renewed their faith in God and humanity.

However, isn't it interesting how faith in God can get in the way at times of faith in humanity. Some months ago, I was preaching on another famous story - the prodigal son - and one of the things I noted was how sometimes in life we have a choice whether to be right, or whether to be in relationship. And it strikes me again, today, as I read the story of the Good Samaritan, how the priest and the Levite were in their minds doing the right thing. Adhering to the law and expectations of their faith. And yet their faith, their belief in doing the right thing, actually got in the way of them doing good. They had the choice whether to be right, or whether to be in relationship, and in the light of today's gospel, choosing to be right was the wrong path.

The priest in the Gospel may have been going to the temple to worship God. But Jesus is teaching his followers to see the ditch as God's dwelling place too: to love our neighbour is to love God. So, if our faith in God is to the detriment of our faith in each other, perhaps our faith is misguided. Faith in God and loving God must always be inseparable from faith in humanity and loving one other.

Sam's funeral on Thursday will be difficult for many of us. I suspect the church will be filled with people, family and friends, all gathered in a state

of shock and bewilderment. However, we must honour the family's wishes for the service to be one of faith and thanksgiving. They are determined to honour Sam and his wishes - people are encouraged to wear red or yellow - and it will be a service filled with happy memories of a young man who lived and loved so well.

Rick who has been a real support to the family over the years will be here, as well as some of Sam's teachers from college. We will endeavour to treasure all that he is and was, and commend him into the safe and loving hands of God. I ask for your prayers for the family and all concerned.

And as the Carsons and our community come to live with this reality that has hit us hard, may we as one - find the faith and love that we need, to hand over the burden of our grief into the safe and loving hands of God.

**Tim**