**The Rt Revd Dr Eleanor Sanderson, Bishop of Hull, reflects on Luke 10.25-37 for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, 13th July.**

This week, we hear one of the most famous parables of Jesus, the parable of the Good Samaritan. I'm very struck that with all that is happening in our world at the moment, hearing this parable is really important for us. No matter how many times you may have heard it in the past, we need to let it sift us to challenge us.

Because often, as we come to the Good Samaritan parable, we are encouraged to think about the relationship that we might have with our neighbour, of understanding who our neighbour is, as the questioning in this conversation in our gospel occurs. If we're really honest at the moment, we are living in such a divided society with increasing tensions between neighbours; wars, and conflicts, and in actual real places that is devastating our world, and breaking our hearts, and calling us to prayer. It's also hugely impacting our social understanding of ourselves with the algorithms as part of social media. This division of ourselves between other people and our identity politics, which means asking this question about loving our neighbour as ourselves is increasingly important. As we are encouraged to separate from those who are not of one mind with us in so many parts of our world, the call to love our neighbour as ourselves is so powerful.

But as well as reminding us of that this morning and inviting the Holy Spirit to sift us as we think about our neighbourhood and our love for our neighbour, the thing that I particularly wanted to invite us to think about this morning is the type of conversation that happens between the person who begins this exchange with Jesus and Jesus himself. We don't know this person's name, but he is very clearly identified as an expert in the law. Introduced as, ‘On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.’ Again, at the end of the passage which we’ve read, ‘The expert in the law replied.’

Now I don't know about you, but I'm not sure how many parts of my life I'd be really confident to say I am an expert in. Sometimes, when we come to know something really well, two things can happen. On the one side, we can become very, very confident because we do know something really well. We've gained experience, we’ve gained knowledge, our whole life has been part of learning to grow in this particular area. We are an expert in something and that's good and we can feel confident in it.

But sometimes, the more we know about something, the more we know there is to know. There are some parts of our world, like in our medical professions, for example, where we really want our experts to be our experts. But there's also parts of our world where actually the more we know, the more we know there is to know, builds our sense of confidence in a strange and different way. I think of that with some of the wonders and mysteries of nature. We know so much about our natural world but knowing that there is still so much more to know is a gift, a gift of humility, and a gift of hunger. The knowledge of God is also a little bit like that, that the more we know about God, the more we know there is to know.

The life of often those that are called our ‘mystics’, those that have had particular deep, mystical encounters with God, and particularly from our religious communities who have spent their life in dedicated, sometimes seclusion into the presence of God with orders of life that are deeply, deeply committed to having a focus of the holiness of God and the obedience of God.

I'm particularly struck by the work of Teresa of Avila. That as she speaks about the encounters of God through someone who was a religious and someone who had mystical experience of God. Her expression was that as we encounter these favours of God's presence, we became more and more humble. We became more aware of the wonderful mystery of God and of who we were as humans in comparison, with loving mercy, deep mercy between God and us, but deep, deep humility. I'm aware of that as I come to this scripture.

I think an expert in the law who is trying to test Jesus is doing something quite particular. This person is confident that they understand God, they understand God's law, and they are not approaching God with a desire to learn from God in the person of Jesus. Instead, they are wanting to test Jesus. In some sense, when you want to test somebody, you are not wanting to change yourself, but you are wanting to make the other person almost uncomfortable, to be able to test what they are or are not. So, this interaction begins with this attitude of test. Jesus replies, speaking to this expert in the law, in the language of their own knowledge, “What is written in the law?” Jesus replied, “and how do you read it?” Jesus invites the expert in the law to speak from their sense of knowledge. Of course, he answers correctly, as Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus replies, “You've answered correctly. Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself. So, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” So again, this expert goes from wanting to test Jesus to wanting to justify himself. To justify yourself means that you aren't wanting to change, that you believe you are right, you have your expert knowledge, you are living the way that you think you should live, and you're wanting to defend those choices. That is very, very different from somebody coming to Jesus asking for help. This person is not wanting Jesus's help. This person is wanting to justify themselves in their own confidence and in their own desire not to need to change the way that they live. It's from that conversation that the parable of the Good Samaritan occurs.

As that parable concludes, Jesus says to this person, “Go and do likewise.” So, for me, I often come back to this scripture in the sense that I don't feel I have very many questions in some ways, of Jesus. I don't want to come to Jesus with an attitude trying to test him, or I don't want to come to Jesus trying to justify myself. That’s because loving the Lord our God with all my heart, with all my soul, and all my strength, and all my mind, and learning to do that and learning to love my neighbour as myself is my life's work. I haven't finished figuring that out. I haven't finished growing in the doing of that. Therefore, until I’ve finished in the growing of the doing of that, and asking Jesus to help me do that, I don't have many more questions because I think that's our life work as followers of Jesus, to learn to do those things, to live that life.

So my prayer for us today is that we allow this gospel to sift us again, this beautiful parable, to help us to be merciful, to open our hearts of mercy against any boundaries between ourselves and neighbours that may have arisen, but also that we will be very, very humble in God's presence and come to Jesus with open hearts and open minds, asking him to help us love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and all our mind, and asking Jesus to help us love our neighbour as ourselves, confident that it is in Jesus that we are justified in God, not in any of our works, but out of love for Christ, love for this world, love for our neighbours. We ask him to help us live the life that he so desires and seeks to enable us to live. Amen.