

**26<sup>th</sup> October, 2014.**

**Reading: Matthew 22: 34 - 46**

**Sermon: Love Your neighbour**

Last week, during the sermon, we were thinking about what it meant to be made in the image of God and we went on to think about the extent to which we reflect the characteristics or attributes of God in our own lives and in our dealings with other people.

This week, the focus is on love and specifically on loving our neighbour which fits in well with the presentation we heard this morning from Chris on the St. Monica's Love and Care Charity, a charity which was set up to provide food, shelter and clothing for the children of Masiphumelele. There we see the founder reaching out to others despite the suffering and the loss she has suffered herself and through her example inspiring others to help those who are unable to do much to help themselves. Jesus' command is to **Love your neighbour.**

That was a scheme which involved the

Catholic Church in Cape Town. In Lochgilphead, St. Margaret's Church is involved in raising funds to support the Mthunzi boys. Their funds help provide education for the boys who are then able to go on and build lives for themselves and hopefully support themselves. Jesus' command is to **Love your neighbour**.

The Church of Scotland in Mid-Argyll, as you know, is partnered with the congregation of Lilongwe in Malawi and at different times and in different ways supports the people of that area. Jesus' command is to **Love your neighbour**.

Rev. Russell McLarty, this week on the Church of Scotland website, cited other initiatives in which the Church is involved at a local level.

He had heard of a priority area congregation which decided to do a makeover for a local family while they were away on Iona with 30 other families at the Priority Areas Holiday Week.

The family home reflected the difficulties faced by that family. It was in a poor state and fairly chaotic so the Church family decided to

help out.

On her return, the mother phoned the minister. She was very tearful and at first he thought she was angry that they had interfered but she wasn't. Instead, she was overwhelmed at the love which had been shown to her and her children, both on Iona and in her own housing scheme.

What was upsetting her was that the children had the new cushions on the floor and were jumping on them but she was told to stop worrying, that what the Church folk wanted was that they would enjoy their home. The Church folk, secure in God's love, were able to extend that love in a very practical way. Jesus' command is to **Love your neighbour**.

Russell McLarty's own mother has got involved in a Church visiting scheme. She is 84 but always telling him about all the old folk she visits throughout the week. She has even persuaded his father to take a bottle of whisky into one of the homes each week for the residents. Again, she is extending the love shown to her by God to those around her in a

very practical way. Jesus' command is to **Love your neighbour.**

Other initiatives have been set up by individuals to help those most in need. Child Line is an example. It was set up in 1986 by Esther Rantzen to help children who were suffering abuse and who had no one to whom they could turn. **Love your neighbour.**

Following the death of her husband, Esther Rantzen also set up Silver Line in 2013 to try and beat loneliness among the elderly. It provides information, friendship and advice and receives a call every two minutes. **Love your neighbour.**

Maryhill Parish Church set up the Greater Maryhill Foodbank in conjunction with local community groups. People come and they get to choose what food they want rather than just being given a bag with the food that the organisers think they should eat.

A wee six year old girl called Darcy who wanted Squirt the Whale for her birthday, decided instead to ask her friends to bring food to her party which she could then donate to the

Foodbank. She had seen children on TV who were hungry and thought helping them was a better idea. Darcy was fulfilling Jesus' command to **Love your neighbour**, even if she didn't realise it.

On a smaller scale, in this congregation, we also started providing food parcels at the request of the Social Work Department to feed those who had nothing for two or three days until their money came through. That initiative was then taken over by MOMA. Jesus' command is to **Love your neighbour**.

As with the Charity we heard about this morning, there are numerous people in our own country who support charities which help children in the poorest areas of the world. There are numerous people who knit jumpers for different organisations to provide some warmth for those who have nothing.

All of those actions are a way of demonstrating the love of God which has been shown to us. All of those actions are a way of reflecting that love and of loving our neighbour whom we may never meet but who is

nonetheless in need, loved by God and part of his family.

But sometimes in our local community it is difficult to help our neighbour. When we know someone who has very little, it's hard to know what to do because we don't want to offend them or be considered to be looking down on their efforts to furnish their homes or to clothe their children.

So what do we do? Surely the basis for anything we do has to be the forging of relationships. It's not about handouts and charity work per se. It has to be about genuinely caring for those around us and loving those around us. It has to be about love before it can be about love in action.

What if your neighbour is a drug addict, an alcoholic or a thief? How do you love that neighbour especially if that person makes your life a misery?

Someone was talking to me recently about Islamic State and the individuals who decapitate others for publicity or for whatever reason. That person said to me that we need to remember

that God loves the members of Islamic State too, including the one with the axe in his hand. How well does that sit with us and yet it's true? Jesus' command is to **Love your neighbour**.

God loves the worst among us every bit as much as the best. We are all the same in God's eyes. Just as a mother cannot forget the child she bore, God cannot forget His children and so Jesus' command is to **Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you**. Jesus' command is to **Love your neighbour**, whoever that neighbour is.

But let's not overlook the second part of that command which says **as you love yourself**. It's not just about loving others. It's about loving God and loving ourselves. It's incredibly difficult to love others if we do not love ourselves.

If we cannot accept our own faults, how will we ever accept the faults of others? If we condemn ourselves and put ourselves down constantly, how are we going to be able to see the good in others?

Russell McLarty said he was listening to a radio programme in the car one day when he

heard the message that he needed to love himself if he was going to love others. The voice on the radio also said that since God could love him, it shouldn't be impossible for him to do the same for himself. That message led to him becoming more gracious towards others, once he had learned to love himself that bit better.

Maybe we all need to hear that voice and that message so that we are able to fulfil Jesus' command in full, not just to love God but to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.