

“Scandalous Compassion” a sermon based on Luke 10:25-37 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 10 July 2016.

He was sick and bleeding and unable to move. In the ditch on the side of the road. They had really done him over and left him for dead. He must have looked dead. Though the blood dripped down his face he could just see out of the corner of his eye. Every part of his body was sore. His clothes had been torn. He realised he must have looked a real mess. He was not surprised the Levite and the priest did not help him. They had their rules. They needed to keep the faith. All he needed was an ordinary Jew to come along. One of his own who could help him in some way. Perhaps someone from his home town. Perhaps a friend of his family. Just any ordinary person who might help lift him, wipe off the blood, sit him down, let him recover. Any ordinary Jew would do. Then he heard steps. Wonderful. And he tried to tilt his head, to look out of the corner of his eye, to see what good Jew it was. But it was a Samaritan. No, no, no ... I don't want to be helped by a Samaritan. Anyone but a Samaritan. The Mishnah said, don't accept help from a non-Jew. You know what they are like. They built their own Temple. They won't have anything to do with us and we won't have anything to do with them. They are not good people. Anyone but a Samaritan.

A Samaritan helped a Jew.

Years before they had had a flaming row, the father and the son, and they hadn't talked for a long time. Their relationship had always been on the edge. It didn't take much to set them off. His father had not treated his mother well and the son hated the father for it. The father had taken his mother for-granted. He expected her to serve uncomplainingly. He criticised her and abused her verbally. The son's bitterness took root. He argued with his father. He stood up for his mother. And so time had gone on and the hatred had become normal, usual, how they were with each other. Everyone else worked around them. The son talked with the mother, but the father, he refused to talk to. And then his mother died suddenly. There were daughters, but they lived overseas and although they came as often as they could, it just wasn't possible

for them to be there all the time. So the son left the father alone. And the time came when the father could not care for himself any longer. The house was too much: too old, too cold, too big. The arthritis limited his movement. He needed care. The son realised there was no one else. He had to find all the courage he could muster. He had to dig into all the forgiveness he could find. He went to help his father. The father resented the fact that he was in such need that he had to accept help from the son who hated him so much. But he had no one else. And gradually, ever so gradually, the relationship moved, contact by contact by contact.

A Samaritan helped a Jew.

Corrie ten Boom was a holocaust survivor. She tells the story of how she and her sister were in a Nazi concentration camp. Her mother had been killed and so she only had her sister. But her sister was not well and she died. She remembered a guard. She could never forget his face. The intensity of feeling towards him. After the war, many years later, she had given a speech about forgiveness in a church, and she was startled to see the man who had been that guard in the concentration camp coming towards her. It was clear he was coming to express appreciation for what she had said. She wanted to run away. He stretched out his hand to thank her and all she could do was pray, Lord help me forgive this man. And involuntarily, as the man held out his hand she found herself lifting up her hand, as if by divine propulsion, to accept his appreciation. He was the last person from whom she wanted to receive thanks.

A Samaritan helped a Jew.

Ngapari Nui. The Taranaki kaumatua who is a patched gang member and who was stopped from volunteering in Whanganui Prison.

When it comes to crime and imprisonment especially of Maori and Pacifica, our nation is in the ditch, sore and bleeding. The Deputy Prime Minister has said prisons are a moral and fiscal failure and has said we must build no more.

When one of our ministers, Nehe Dewes, was senior prison chaplain he refused to bless the opening of any more prisons.

Our rate of incarceration is ridiculous. We are in the ditch.

So who will help us?

The late Sir Rodney Gallen, Presbyterian elder, distinguished High Court Judge, and Sir Norman Perry, former Moderator of the General Assembly of our Church, helped establish Mahi Tahi Trust, an organisation to support Maori in prison.

The people they relied on most were those who had been in prison.

Ngapari Nui had been chairperson of Ngati Ruanui. He has served on the Taranaki Maori Trust Board. He is supported by his local National MP. He discourages community and family members from joining the gang. He had been a patched member of Black Power for 38 years and stayed because he believed he would be more effective as a member than if he gave his patch up.

"Because... once you finish with whatever organisation it is then your role is finished within there and you don't hold the same mana," he said.

A Samaritan helped a Jew.

Israeli and Palestinian.

Croat and Serb.

Muslim and Christian.

Who is it for us?

Who has hurt us so much that they would be the last person from whom we would accept help, only if we had no choice because the need was so great?

Who seems to us so useless that we would only accept help from them if we had no choice because the need was so great?

Who seems to us so wrong, so misguided, that they would be the last person from whom we would accept help unless we had no choice?

Who is the Samaritan for us?

All of us are in some ditch or other. And it might just be that the only person who can help us most is the last person from whom we want to receive it.

It all started with a question.

What must I do to inherit eternal life, the lawyer asked.

Eternal life, said David HC Read, is not about length, but about depth.

Eternal life, he said, is life plus, quality of life not quantity of life.

Eternal life is life in God, life with God, life lived with God, height depth length width.

And that quality of life, is life open to the other.

Eternal life was the gift of one crucified beyond the wall, on the town rubbish tip, between two robbers ... the last from whom we might receive help.

What is crucial though, is that moment, when we choose to receive from other, to take the help offered, to accept the word given or to shut ourselves off from the other, when we let the rules, the categories, the history close us in on ourselves?

Projecting from that moment to millions of such moments around the world, to the pattern of our responding, we are in our nation and world in great danger of not receiving from the Samaritan.

Pray God, keep us receptive to the Samaritan.

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**Knox Church**  
449 George Street  
Dunedin  
New Zealand  
Ph. (03) 477 0229  
[www.knoxchurch.net](http://www.knoxchurch.net)

Kerry Enright: 027 467 5542, [minister@knoxchurch.net](mailto:minister@knoxchurch.net)