

GOOD SAMARITAN HOMILY

13TH July 2025

The best-known parables in the New Testament are “The Prodigal Son” and the one we heard this morning. “Who is my neighbour” was a profound question in the time of Jesus and is equally profound today. The Samaritans in New Testament times were to the Jewish people of the day the untouchables, the ostracised, the objects of every imaginable prejudice. They were the people to be kept at the far edge of the social universe. So, for Jesus to tell a story in which the **hero** is a Samaritan and in which the Jews are the **villains**, was gloriously challenging the accepted norms of the day.

Arthur Thompson was a boy in my childhood. In July every year I went with my family to a beach house, on a links golf course, at a place called Donabate. The journey there (all 18 miles of it) seemed to take all day and we brought everything but the kitchen sink with us. About five families gathered for the month, some in bungalows, some in tents, and some in caravans. There were around twenty children and we played together every day all day. Arthur was a caravan boy, he was red haired, fat and freckled. He was needy and lonely and his catch cry was “can I come too”. We quietly excluded him, gently despised him or, with rolling eyes, tolerated him. He was the Samaritan of my childhood.

As I pondered the parable, I thought about the characters in the parable and what the effect of the events would have had upon them. The victim of the bashing and robbery may well have been astonished by the actions of his rescuer from Samaria, as well as being confronted by the neglect of the priest and the Levite. He would have had his world turned upside down as this Good Samaritan almost certainly saved his life both literally and metaphorically.

The priest, who passed by, may well have consoled himself with the thought that he was too busy, or already too late, or would become “unclean” and therefore could not stop to render assistance.

The Levite maybe just didn’t want to get involved. The inn keeper would undoubtedly have been awed by the generosity of the Samaritan who not only rescued the victim, but paid for his keep at the inn whilst recovery took place. And then added to his caring by offering to call in on his return journey and settle up any further expenses incurred by the victim. Generosity is infectious and I would love to think that the inn keeper told the story to his family and friends as well as to a lot of his guests, and that they would pass the story onto many others. And I would further like to think that as a result, a whole group of people became more generous and less prejudiced.

Somehow the unexpected kindness of strangers is always profound and transformative. Maybe the opposite of love is **not** hatred, but apathy. This parable demands that in our lives and in our churches, we **include** rather than exclude people, as everyone is our neighbour. We are to respond to what they need with compassion. We are inspired to seek the Sacred Spirit in unlikely people, people we don't necessarily like, or whose views are different to ours. Loving your neighbour is not about what we **feel** but what we **do**.

And so back to Arthur Thompson, the Samaritan of my childhood. Many decades after those idyllic Donabate days and after I had migrated to Australia, I went home to visit my father. Two days after I got there, Dad had a massive stroke and spent a harrowing six weeks dying. Three weeks before he died, I got a phone call from Arthur Thompson "I have just heard about how sick your dad is and I want to know if there is anything, anything at all that I can do". Now, I had expected many people to ring me and offer whatever help they could, but hardly any of them did. Of Arthur Thompson I had no such expectations and anyway I had had no contact with him for many years. And here he was, the boy we had treated so badly as children, genuinely concerned and sympathetic. To compound this caring gesture on his part was the fact that he himself was mortally ill with a brain tumour; something I only discovered some months later. And as I pondered on Arthur's kindness and concern, I remembered that my father had always insisted that Arthur was included in everything that we did. He came on every fishing trip, played in every game of cricket, joined us in harvesting wild strawberries and on wet days, of which there are many in **every** Irish summer, competed against us in games of Monopoly and cards. Far from feeling excluded and a modern-day Samaritan, Arthur Thompson felt he was a fully fledged member of our group, all because my father refused to allow us to marginalise him.

Arthur Thompson was **my** neighbour and **he** was my Good Samaritan.