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**Controversial Love** by James M.

**Luke 10:25-37**

The Belgian, Father Damien, became a missionary in Hawaii where he discovered an island inhabited by lepers living in shocking conditions. He offered to look after that settlement. It was a massive sacrifice because he would be cut off from society. On his own, he provided physical, spiritual and emotional comfort. He served as their pastor and doctor improving water, food supplies and housing, founding two orphanages. After 16 years in 1884 he got leprosy but carried on working for five more years till he died aged 49. They made a film of his amazing example of sacrificial love towards a group of people half way round the world that he'd never heard of.

Jesus tells a story of incredible, sacrificial love for a complete stranger in Luke chapter 10. A lawyer asked Jesus, 'What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus asked him, 'What's written in the law, lawyer?' He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" "

**1. Love the Lord completely:** "No other God besides me" means there is no room for anything else to take centre stage. It's about God as our priority. Complete love for God is the thing that drives everything else in our lives. It's the thing by which we enjoy all the good things God has given us. That kind of love for God leads to contentment and eternal life. Being able to comprehend how much the Lord really loves us (that he gave his own son to die for us, so we can be forgiven and be adopted into the most amazing family) should ignite the passion to love the Lord completely and our neighbours as ourselves. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love him because he first loved us." He puts an end to our suffering by his suffering. "Love for God is not essentially behaviour but affection, not deeds but the life, God's glory becomes our supreme pleasure." (John Piper)

**2. Love your neighbour like you do yourself:** Back in Jesus' time neighbour and brother (tribe, race and faith) meant the same thing. But Jesus' answer is so radical because the two main characters in his story are arch enemies: a Jew and a Samaritan. We have to consider other races and classes as my neighbour even if he or she is from another faith. We are called to do good to everyone in every way. Until we understand that everything in Biblical law is about love, we can't understand what the law is about. Love defines what it means to live lawfully. Unless we are head-over-heels in love with Jesus, how are we going to be able to love our neighbours as ourselves? Jesus shows the lawyer that the law is very important but only if you understand true love. That's why Jesus hangs out with those the lawyer would call sinners. The Father Son and Spirit are in a dynamic orbital dance around one another. The Son 'lives in the bosom of the Father' (John 1:18) the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14) in turn the Son glorifies the Father and then the Father glorifies the Son. (John 17:5) This has been going on for all eternity. They love each other completely and without this love, the universe can't hang together. Before everything, there was love. (Tim Keller: *The Reason For God*) The Samaritan loved this stranger as he would have loved himself.

**3. This age needs that kind of controversial and radical love:** There are four practical areas where we can think about the needs on our doorstep. Many can't afford to eat. We have a growing mental health issue, we have many who are vulnerable, and our environment is suffering. By the end of this year 150million or one in ten people (237 times the size of Wales), will be in extreme poverty surviving on

£1.30 a day or less. (World Bank) This year, 10,000 children in Wrexham and Flintshire are living in extreme poverty, an increase of 15%. One-in-five children in Wales live in a family defined as severely poor surviving on less than £43.80 a day. The Tussle Trust found that after housing the people referred to their foodbanks have £8.00 a day to live on. We pay £7.00 a day for our gas water and electricity. The Message Community Grocery Charity emerged out of the pandemic last year. It bridges the gap between Foodbanks and benefits which do not cover living costs. But it's not just about the food. There's also a range of free extra support like job clubs, money management support, healthy cooking classes and exploring Christianity. "We seek to bring the kingdom of God in seen and unseen ways"

Mental health and slavery are becoming more prevalent. Police found 400 victims living on as little as 50 pence a day working on farms and in poultry factories owned by our top supermarket brands. Today the global trade in slavery is more widespread than the entire 350 year history of the transatlantic slave trade. There's even a North Wales safe-guarding board set up specifically to investigate concerns about people trafficking coming into Holyhead. So many needs!

Our love for God must be reflected in the role he gave to humanity. He entrusted the world to our care. So caring for God's creation is one of the most fundamental things we should be doing. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." One to five species a year are becoming extinct. Caring for the planet is caring for people. The poorest in society suffer the most when we don't look after the world we live in.

**4. What's the call to action?** What can the church do in response? My brother interviewed some gang members in Cape Town. Initially they spoke warmly about the care and support they received from the local church. After a while they felt the church didn't love them quite so much as they thought. They were expected to act and speak in a different way. Do we love our community including everyone in it without strings attached? Do we listen to understand what their needs really are? Do we think we know better? It is complicated but in Jesus' story the Samaritan just responded to what was in front of him. We have a brilliant PCT that looks after the needs of our community and our people as well as a mercy fund to help those in financial needs. Our mission committee helps fund overseas needs. We do various ministries like debt and marriage counselling, making space for our young people so we can help their physical, mental and spiritual well-being. We have loads of amazing opportunities as we emerge out of this pandemic. I am sure you can think of lots of ways in which we as a church could offer really important and helpful things to those on our doorstep.

The Good Samaritan wasn't running a massive ministry. He just responded to what was in front of him even though it threw out his agenda and took time. You can do that. Sometimes it may just mean listening to someone or giving time or money, use Fair Trade, plant a tree. I hope you will ask Jesus to open your heart and your mind to understand more deeply the love he has for you. Ask him to help you not feel overwhelmed, to give you the strength to use the gifts and skills he has given you to do his kingdom work: to love him completely, to love your neighbour like you love yourself. Pray you will see what is in front of you and be an amazing light in our community showing the way to the controversial love of Jesus.