

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity (Year C)

Sunday, 13 July 2025

Coventry Cathedral

Focus Texts: Colossians 1:1-14/Luke 10:25-37

Loving and Holy God,  
You call us to love beyond boundaries,  
to show mercy beyond comfort,  
and to be neighbours in a world that builds walls.  
Open your Word to our hearts and minds  
And our hearts and our hands to your world,  
For we ask it in your Son's name, Jesus Christ. Amen

What does dinosaurs and the story of the Good Samaritan have in common?

Stay with me.

As a lover of 90's science fiction movies I was determined to see the most recent *Jurassic Park* film: "*Jurassic World: Rebirth*", directed by Gareth Edwards. A sequel to the 1993 Stephen Spielberg film, we see in the most recent film a world struggling to coexist with the consequences of its own ambition. Dinosaurs- brought back through genetic manipulation- now roam freely across Earth. What started as a scientific marvel has become a global crisis. And how does humanity respond? In fear, control, walls, weapons, and containment zones.

Rather than seeing these creatures as part of creation- albeit a creation of our own making- humanity seeks to dominate and even eliminate them. They are "othered," dangerous, inconvenient. The film reveals something deeply uncomfortable: ***we created life, but we do not know how to live alongside it.***

I promise you this is not a sermon about dinosaurs- you will have to come to our next gathering of Wonder for that LOL.

The deeper question I want to raise is about how we treat those things and people we fear. When the "other" arrives- unexpected, uninvited, or uncontrolled- do we respond with walls or with mercy?

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan turns the world's logic on its head. It reframes the Lawyers question from "Who is my neighbour?" to "How can I *be* one?" because asking "who is my neighbour sets limits and parameters to the possibilities of who those might be. Whereas "How can I be a neighbour?" swings the doors wide open.

The priest and the Levite walk by, possibly afraid, possibly busy. But the Samaritan- despised and marginalized in his context- crosses the boundary. He touches the wounded man, treats his wounds, and pays for his care. He becomes a neighbour in the fullest, most active sense.

In our world today, we are surrounded by others who are wounded- not by physical robbers, but by systems, policies, prejudice, poverty, and exile. Strangers. Refugees. The feared. The inconvenient. The uninvited.

The architecture of division surrounds us, from literal walls between countries to algorithmic walls between perspectives. Against this backdrop, Christ calls us to be bridge-builders. The Good Samaritan built a bridge across the chasm of ethnic hatred- a bridge made of bandages, oil, wine, two denarii, and a promise to return.

His bridge-building wasn't theoretical or merely verbal; it was practical and costly.

Today's bridge-building requires similar substance. It might look like the cathedral hosting interfaith dialogues that move beyond polite conversation to address real tensions and build genuine relationships. It might be congregation members volunteering at the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Center, offering not just services but friendship across cultural divides. It might mean difficult conversations with family members who espouse dehumanizing views, speaking truth with both courage and love. It could involve supporting organizations (like the CCN) that bring together youth from different backgrounds, creating spaces where 'enemies' can discover their common humanity. Bridge-building requires patience- most divides aren't crossed in a single dramatic gesture but through consistent, humble efforts over time. It demands creativity, finding unexpected connections across seemingly unbridgeable differences. Most challenging, it requires willingness to be misunderstood, as bridge-builders are often criticized from both sides of the divide. Yet this is precisely the ministry to which Christ calls us in a world obsessed with fortification.

***Fear lies at the heart of our failure to be good neighbours.*** We fear what we do not understand, and this fear drives us to build walls rather than bridges. In Coventry, we know something about this. After the cathedral was bombed in 1940, the community could have chosen hatred and revenge. Instead, rebirth, relationship and reconciliation was spoken of while the smoke still billowed from the rubble. This place stands as a testament to choosing love over fear. The priest and Levite in Jesus' parable were likely afraid—of ritual impurity, of robbers still lurking, of becoming involved in something messy and costly. ***Fear made them cross to the other side.***

This is our challenge today: to move toward, not away from, those we have been taught to fear. When we hear rhetoric that demonizes immigrants, minorities, or those of different faiths, we must recognize it as a manifestation of fear, not security. Perfect love, as scripture tells us, casts out fear.

In small daily choices and larger public stands, we must practice this love that refuses to see anyone as 'other,' that recognizes the face of Christ in every human being we encounter and even in the faces of those we see on our phone and tv screens.

What does it mean to be a good neighbour in our fractured world?

Jesus' parable disrupts our comfortable definitions. In ancient Palestine, a 'neighbour' was someone like you- same religion, same ethnicity, same values.

Today, being a good neighbour requires an expansion of our moral imagination. A good neighbour in the 21st century recognizes that proximity is no longer just geographical but global. Through social media, and interconnected economies, we are brought into relationship with people we will never meet but whose lives are intertwined with ours.

The coffee we drink connects us to farmers in Colombia. The clothes we wear link us to factory workers in Bangladesh. The carbon we emit affects island communities in the Pacific. The decisions our government makes affects the people of Gaza.

In a society increasingly organized around categorizing who deserves care and who doesn't, who belongs and who doesn't, the radical neighbourliness of Christ demands we reject such sorting. A good neighbour today understands these connections and takes responsibility for them. But more fundamentally, a good neighbour recognizes the sacred worth of every human being- regardless of nationality, religion, gender identity, or legal status.

'Goodness' in neighbourliness isn't defined by warm feelings toward those near us but by concrete actions that extend care to all within our sphere of influence—especially those society has taught us to fear or dismiss.

Jesus consistently moved toward those society pushed away—touching lepers, speaking with Samaritans, defending women accused of sexual sin, welcoming children, eating with tax collectors and sinners. His ministry was characterized by boundary-crossing love that scandalized religious authorities and challenged social hierarchies.

Whose absence don't we notice in our communities? Whose struggles don't register in our prayers? Whose stories don't shape our understanding of God's work in the world? Inclusivity requires us to recognize how privilege—whether based on race, nationality, class, education, gender, sexuality, or ability—shapes our perspective and often blinds us to others' realities.

The epistle to the Colossians begins with Paul's affirmation of the faith, love, and hope that characterize the Christian community. He prays that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. From Colossians, we learn that our faith ***must be rooted in Christ, growing in knowledge and bearing fruit in action.***

From Luke's gospel, we learn precisely what that fruit looks like: ***compassion that crosses boundaries, mercy that takes risks, and love that commits to the long journey of healing.***

Together, our readings challenge us to resist the polarizing forces of our time by embodying a different way—one marked by what Paul calls 'bearing fruit in every good work.'

In an age where Christians are often tempted to retreat into like-minded communities or to adopt the harsh rhetoric of political extremes, these scriptures call us to the more difficult path of engaged compassion.

How easily we too find reasons not to get involved: 'It's complicated.' 'What difference would I make?' 'There are proper channels for this.' 'I have responsibilities elsewhere.'

Take out choir and musicians for example- are they solving world peace? Maybe not. But they have been faithful in showing up service after service, helping to shape and lead our sung worship so that when we walk into this place - we are re-energised, refuelled and recharged for the work to which calls us. Thank you!

Following this service, Shona and Codie will present Zion to be baptised into the Christian faith. A faith, I am hoping you as parents and Godparents will impress on him as one that will require him to be a Good Samaritan himself now and again.

The world may call exclusion and wall-building “security”, but we name it as sin.

True security lies not in walls but in relationships, not in fear but in love, not in homogeneity but in the beautiful diversity of the image of God.

**Disclaimer alert-** at the end of *Jurassic World: Rebirth*, the protagonists discover the dinosaur DNA samples they were looking for which could be used to treat life-threatening heart disease and instead of selling it off to multi-billion-dollar pharmaceutical companies and making a profit, they decide to take it to share it with the world.

Now we might not be able to heart disease (maybe Baby Zion will!?) ,but the story of the Good Samaritan ends with Jesus' simple command: **'Go and do likewise.'** **Not 'go and feel likewise'** or **'go and speak likewise,'** but **'go and do likewise.'** May we become living parables of God's boundless love in a world so desperate for compassion and connection. **Amen.**