

Sermon Topic: Loving God, Serving Together by Bishop Dr Chong Chin Chung, 16 Feb 2020  
Sermon Text: Matt 22:37-39; Luke 10:25-29

#### A. Introduction

- Today we celebrate the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Methodist Church in Singapore. The passage of Scripture is a familiar one to us – it was one of John Wesley’s favourite passages to illustrate why we should pursue scriptural and social holiness. It is also a reminder of the Methodist confession– **to love God with our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.**
- Matt 22:36-40 and Mark 12:30-31 record Jesus’ response to the lawyer’s questions on the greatest and most important commandment of all. However, only Luke’s account records Jesus turning the question back to the lawyer to answer it himself (Luke 10:26). After answering his own question, the lawyer continued with another question for Jesus – who is my neighbour? (v 29) to which Jesus then told the story of the Good Samaritan, which is not found in any other gospel.
- There is a close connection between loving God with our whole being, and loving our neighbour in the same way.

#### B. Loving our Neighbours – Who is my Neighbour, and whose Neighbour am I?

- Every devout Jew would have memorised these scriptures (*Shema*) – Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, and regarded the teachers of the law as the authorities on interpretation of Scripture.
- The lawyer who came to Jesus believed that **eternal life depended on one’s actions and behaviour.** When Jesus posed the question back to him, he answered confidently (Luke 10:27-28) When the lawyer heard Jesus agreeing with him, he was very pleased and proud of himself.
- However, this episode revealed his rather superficial understanding of the law – that loving God means that one must do or perform all the required religious rituals adequately to satisfy or demonstrate the greatest commandment. In fact, doing so may even enable one to earn extra credit and merit for loving God.
- It is not difficult to see why then, with such teaching from the lawyers, the Jews strove hard to follow the law carefully. This may **seem simple or straightforward, but it was difficult to do in reality.**
- Loving one’s neighbour was probably even harder to accomplish compared to loving God, because it is sometimes more difficult to get along with those we can see, compared with the God we cannot see. There are no rules or guidelines to define who counts as our neighbour. In Jesus’ time, the Gentiles and other races were considered unclean. The lawyer held a conventional and rigid understanding of the definition of neighbour. This reveals **a blind spot and inconsistency in the lawyer’s beliefs- that the definition of a neighbour depended on his personal choice and decision.** This is why he asked who his neighbour was.
- The Samaritans fell in the category of “not my neighbour”. They were not part of God’s elect, being a people of mixed blood and apostates and were not under God’s blessing.
- In the parable, the first people to arrive on the scene were a Priest and a Levite, educated men of reason who would have learnt the *Sherma* scriptures from young. The Bible says they “saw with eyes but passed by” the man who was attacked and seriously injured. Only the Samaritan whose **heart was moved by his sight,** came to the injured man’s aid.

- The lawyer acknowledged that the Samaritan was the injured man's neighbour, and Jesus told him to go and do likewise.
- When Jesus asked the lawyer whom the injured man's neighbour was, He was actually asking the lawyer to consider who his neighbour was. Jesus could have also been asking the lawyer to consider "whose neighbour am I"? If the Samaritan could become the neighbour of the assaulted man, the lawyer could also become the neighbour for someone in need.
- It is **a reminder for us not just to ask "who is my neighbour" but "whose neighbour am I"**
- This story is also meant for us now. It is **a reminder that loving a neighbour requires the same kind of effort that we put into loving God, that is, with all our heart and mind** [In Matt 22:39, Jesus said, "the second is like it"]

#### C. Spiritual formation through Inward and Outward Holiness

- John Wesley was constantly persuading the believers he pastored to pursue a lifetime of holiness- both inward and outward holiness.
- Inward holiness means to believe, trust, love, worship, imitate and obey God with our whole heart, mind and strength.
- **Outward holiness is to love our neighbour – anyone and everyone.**
- **Religious belief if not lived out in the presence of others and not in interaction with others, has no place or purpose at all.** Thus, Wesley often emphasised that **outward holiness must be seen in our responses towards our neighbours.** In his tract, 'The Character of a Methodist', he pointed out that these traits were not just marks of Methodists, but ought to be marks of all Christians. He listed 8 traits: always joyful, gives thanks in all circumstances, prays unceasingly, loves God and loves his neighbour, is pure in heart, does the will of God, does no evil, by word or action, does good to all men, including neighbours, strangers, friends and enemies. This was not just applicable for Wesley or Christians in the 1700s, but for us today.
- Pursuing inward and outward holiness (love for God and love for neighbor) is the mark of all Methodists.

#### D. Living and sustaining a lifestyle of loving God and serving together

- Wesley acknowledged that this is a discipline requiring others to provide mutual support and to watch over us.
- He suggested two ways: **First, believers must live in the grace of God.** Only God's infinite grace can renew and sustain us spiritually to live abundantly holy lives. This is by the means of grace, which includes scripture study, prayer, fasting, the communion of saints (fellowship and Christian conferencing), the breaking of bread, private and corporate worship. By such means of grace, Christians may train to live godly spiritual lives. In this way, we are able to have grace in abundance, sufficient to love and care for others. This is what Wesley called 'works of piety'.
- **Second, believers must have others journeying with them in holy living.** Wesley believed that those who try to live a holy life by themselves will find that quite impossible unless there are Christians close to us to give encouragement and support. Christians must be in connection with one another to live healthy spiritual lives and grow. Then, the Church will be even more fruitful in her mission.
- Wesley believed we must have such 'acts of mercy', meaning good works done to others, including neighbours, strangers, friends and enemies, without which devout worship on its own is meaningless.

- When Methodists are connected, many things that the individual or small group cannot accomplish become possible and well accomplished. **Christians cannot isolate ourselves, but be in mutual connection to be a more fruitful body of Christ.**

E. Conclusion

- Wesley and many of his followers lived their lives caring for the poor, the weak and the sick, regardless of whether the latter believed in the Lord or not. Jesus wants us to become a neighbour to such groups.
- As we celebrate 135 years of church planting in Singapore, **we must remember that God put us here to be good neighbours with those around us.** We cannot think that we are so great as to single-handedly achieve that much for a society, or to accomplish great undertakings by ourselves. It is only in joint effort with others (and other Christians) that we have built schools, reduced illiteracy, raised the standard of education, and given opportunities for the nurturing and development of talents. It was also with the help of our neighbours that we could raise the status of women, eradicate drug abuse, and build orphanages and old age homes.
- This 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary is not just one with fellow Methodists, but the neighbours we have had for all these years – friends of different faiths, races, languages and walks of life to share in the blessing that God has given to the Methodist church.
- Let us share His blessings with our neighbours – loving God, serving together.

**Personal/Cell Group Discussion Questions (Luke 10:25-37, 40 mins)**

***Lawyer's 1<sup>st</sup> Question: "WHAT MUST I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?"***

1. What do you think eternal life means (cf John 17:3)?
2. Is this question important to you? Why or why not?

***Lawyer's 2<sup>nd</sup> Question: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?***

3. What is Jesus' point in having the Samaritan exemplify brotherly love toward one's neighbor?
4. What is most important to Jesus? (vs 28, vs 37)

***Jesus' Question: WHICH OF THESE 3 DO YOU THINK WAS A NEIGHBOR?***

5. In the conversation between the lawyer and Jesus, who is testing whom?
6. What final test does Jesus leave for the lawyer?
7. How would you apply this story to your own life?
8. Whose neighbor are you, and how does Jesus want you to relate to your neighbor in light of COVID-19?