



HardGospel
Love God • Love your neighbour

HardGospel Sunday

9th September 2007

The House of Bishops
have designated
Sunday 9th September
2007 as a special
'Hard Gospel Sunday'.

inform

inspire...

inspire

This Hard Gospel Sunday Pack contains suggested liturgical material, commentary on the designated Scripture readings and possible sermon suggestions.

There are also suggestions on ways to involve all age groups in the parish, ways to connect locally on the day with those outside the membership of the parish, and ways to relate the Hard Gospel theme to Racial Justice Sunday which also falls on the 9th of September 2007.

Whatever worship and additional activities you plan, we hope that you will use Hard Gospel Sunday as an occasion to **inform**, **inspire**, **challenge**, and **invite** commitment from a wide cross-section of your parish membership and as an opportunity to engage directly in loving your neighbours.

www.hardgospel.net

and thehardblog <http://blogs.hardgospel.net>

challenge

invite...



Hard Gospel theme: 'Life Beyond Boundaries'

Introduction

The Hard Gospel is a call to 'Life Beyond Boundaries'.

There is a natural human need for boundaries. Difference helps us define our identity, nationality and culture. However the experience of the early Church was that such boundaries were transcended by a new, greater identity in Jesus Christ; There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3.28).

The beauty of God's creation lies in its diversity and contrast. So God continues to use difference to enrich and deepen our lives. However, when it comes to living with human diversity, we all too easily fall into a narrow preference for our kind of people and either fear or look down on those who are different. Our comfort demands the assurance of the familiar rather than challenge of the unknown. Even more as institutions, Churches all too easily prescribe conformity rather than celebrate diversity. So for many living with difference is an unfamiliar and unwelcome experience rather than an essential ingredient in what it means to follow the Living Christ.

As we have seen above, "living positively with difference" was the experience of the early Church. This diversity created difficulties, but responding to those challenges opened up new possibilities and undreamt ways of living out the Good News. In looking at the Hard Gospel - Loving God and Loving Our Neighbours as Ourselves - we are returning to the roots of Jesus' message and opening ourselves to a renewed dynamic for being the Church for our day. This Hard Gospel Sunday, part of our Church wide initiative, is an opportunity to hear again the call to a 'Life Beyond Boundaries' and to respond to the challenge.

Suggestions for introducing the scripture readings during the service

The First Reading Isaiah 58. 6-12

"The writer's message is clear; worship without justice is worthless. Our worship is valid only if it transforms our relationships with others."

Psalm 15

"The test for entering God presence is not ritual purity but is again linked to how we treat our neighbour with justice, dignity and respect."

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 5.14-21

"Jesus resurrection proves that God can make all things new. Not least ourselves! 'Be Reconciled' is our central message."

Key Reading Luke 10.25-37

To have eternal life it is not enough to know that we ought to love God and our neighbour; we must also practice this love, even when it is inconvenient or when the other person is an enemy. For every person in need is our brother or sister.

Suggestion for Sermon Preparation

A helpful resource is Bishop Richard Henderson's introduction to the parable originally published in 'Life Beyond Boundaries - a theology of the Hard Gospel'. This can be downloaded from www.hardgospel.net and click on [Resources](#).

You know best how to apply this parable of the Good Samaritan in your situation. The notes that follow are offered as an aid as you explore how the Hard Gospel challenge - 'to love God and our neighbour as ourselves' - applies in your local context. They are offered only as a possible starting point to stimulate your thinking. They are in no way prescriptive. If you wish to use what follows you will need to supplement the material with stories and examples that can illustrate how this applies in your local context.

A meeting with 'others', who are different or who do not belong to your Church family, or represent "them" in your context, in preparation for this service could be very valuable.

Starter thoughts on 'Life Beyond Boundaries'

Beyond Religion: Loving God cannot be separated from Loving our Neighbour

The Lawyer's question "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" is designed to test Jesus. When Jesus asks what does the law say, the lawyer combines Israel's great ancient prayer The "Shema" on the love of God (Deut 6.4-9), with Leviticus 19.18b on the love of the neighbour.

Here Jesus is following prophets like Amos (5.18-27) and our first reading Isaiah - genuine worship includes loving service of others. Loving God involves loving our neighbour as ourselves.

- Does our worship portray a committed concern for our neighbours?
- Following the Old Testament reading, does our concern for social justice have sufficient priority in our worship and Church life?
- In what ways do we divide our Sunday Worship from our Monday World?

Beyond "Us": God is not our tribal possession. He is the God of "Us" and "Them"

Jesus went beyond social, cultural and religious boundaries in choosing a Samaritan as a model good neighbour. What was so shocking, unacceptable, and scandalous was he choose one of "them" as an example for "us". The Samaritans ("them") were seen as religious rivals. They were regarded as heretics, outcasts, socially and morally depraved. Yet it was the Samaritan who was shown as fulfilling the law of love, rather than the Priest and Levite, the pillars of Jewish religious and social establishment.

The result of this was profoundly shocking. Jesus was teaching that God was not 'our' God, the God of the Jews only. God was beyond "us". This story teaches that God's loving action was shown through a despised Samaritan rather than "our" religious teachers and leaders.

- In what ways are we tempted to regard 'our God' too narrowly?
- How might we become aware that God is 'bigger than our church', already out there, working in the world, in people and places we don't know about?
- How might our life as a parish better declare God's love for 'them' as well as for 'us'?

Beyond Church: Is our concern for the congregation or the community, or both?

If loving God, cannot be separated from loving our neighbour; if our neighbour is not restricted to those who are "one of us", but includes "them" (those as different as Jews and Samaritans; those whom "we" despise and distance ourselves from) this teaching of Jesus calls us to shape our Church life as part of the wider community.

The concerns, needs, problems, and the dreams, hopes and possibilities, of those who make up our local community are priorities for the Parish.

The essence of the message we preach is "Be reconciled", to God and to one another. Therefore, the task of making enemies friends is central to what we do as Church. (Second Reading). We are called to be peace makers (children of God Matt 5.9).

- Is our Parish Programme so busy that we have no time to relate to "others" (Is there a similarity with the Priest and the Levite as they pass by in Jesus story?) How do we adjust priorities?
- If we are to love our neighbour (those who are different) more effectively, what part of our church programme will have to change?
- It is a common thought in the Church of Ireland that the Church's programme is focused on the parishioners. The parishioners in their turn are the witnesses to Christ's love in the community. Does this model of Church life reflect the radical message of the Good Samaritan story? Notice it was the religious leaders, the Priest and Levite who failed to love. The command to love God and our neighbour must be at the heart of all the Church does in every aspect of its life.

Questions, exploring the theme.

Who are the "them" for "us"? It is likely that among "them" are the most vulnerable and needy members of our community, and those we find most difficult to relate to.

Do we meet with the "them" we have named? Have we provided opportunities to hear their story? Or do we pass by on the other side, cut off from those who are different.

The Good Neighbour at great personal cost responded to the needs of the victim he met. What is the cost for "us" of loving our neighbour as ourselves? Do we see this as part of our commitment as Church?

The Good Samaritan was used to teach Jews how to obey God. It may be uncomfortable to learn from those who are different, even painful, but it is the way we grow. Do we believe that we have much to receive from those who are different?

This is a call to follow Jesus on the way. No single action can be a complete response. But what is our first step to address the difference between "them" and "us"?

Possible Children's Address - suggested material:

The Good Samaritan story from the Fount Children's Bible or another modern paraphrase.

"The Bird" by Nicholas Allan: ISBN 0 09 176707 5, Random House. A Powerpoint presentation of this story is available on the Hard Gospel website for downloading to use by permission on this occasion.

A Prayer suitable for use with "The Bird" as Children Address:

Thank you, God, for making this world such an interesting place by making us all different. Help us not to be afraid or suspicious of those who are not like us. Help us instead to learn from those who are different from us in habits, culture, creed or colour. Help us to remember that to them we are the different ones. Teach us how to respect those who are different - in all that we say and do. For we remember that we are all of the same humanity - children of the same Creator. Amen

(Written by Norman Richardson - Corrymeela Worshipbook.)

Possible Prayers and Other Liturgical Material

The following are offered as resources to texture Public Worship on Hard Gospel Sunday.

Introductory Sentence

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. John 4: 24

Opening Affirmation

Leader Christ, You are our Peace
All **You have broken down the hostility between us**
Leader There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free,
male nor female
All **We are all one in You**
Leader God was in You, reconciling the world to God
All **And has enlisted us in this service of reconciliation**
Leader We are in Your Body
All **And are members one of another**
Leader We are a community of the Holy Spirit
All **Called to be witnesses of God's love**
(From Travelling the Road of Faith, Worship resources from the Corrymeela Community)

Prayer of Confession (A):

The Lord calls us to love one another as he loved us. In silence we call to mind those times when we have failed to love or be loved and we ask God's forgiveness. (silence)

We have not loved you with all our heart, soul, strength and mind.

Lord, forgive us.
Lord, heal us.

We have walked by on the other side and failed to love our neighbour.

Lord, forgive us.
Lord, heal us.

We have chosen not to see you in those we meet and have harboured bitterness in our hearts.

Lord, forgive us.
Lord, heal us.

We have been harsh in our judgements and cautious with our love.

Lord, forgive us.
Lord, heal us.

Declaration of God's Forgiveness

May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw us/you to himself,
and cleanse us/you from all our/your sins
that we/you may behold the glory of his Son,
the Word made flesh,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession (B):

(From Corrymeela Worshipbook)

God, we often find it difficult to live with the differences among human beings: We harbour prejudices toward those of other races and cultures; we feel threatened by those whose politics are different from our own; and, we find it difficult to accept the beliefs and practices even of other Christian traditions.

Forgive the subtle ways we contribute to the conflicts of our society and world. Remove the insecurity which leads to our narrow preference for 'our kind of people.' In its place, give us not only tolerance but a healthy appreciation for what we can learn from those who are different. And, above all our diversity, help us find an overarching unity in the service of Jesus, our common Lord, in whose name we meet and pray. **Amen**

Suitable Canticle

The Song of Christ's Glory (p132 BCP 2004)

Key Reading The Gospel Luke 10.25-37



A Response to the Gospel

- Reader 1: God, help us to understand the answer Jesus gave to the question, "Who is my neighbour?"
About a person on the road who needed help.
About those who refused it - and the one person who gave it.
- Reader 2: Make us more aware that whether we know them or not, even whether we like them or not, all people everywhere are our neighbours.
- Reader 3: Make us more sensitive to the needs of those we meet at home, in a shop, along the street, anywhere.
- Reader 1: Jesus, as we are confronted by the needs of all our neighbours in this world, may we remember how you responded to the people you met everyday.
May we follow your example and reach out to others offering welcome, friendship and help in practical ways. And in so doing may we discover you in the neighbours we serve. **Amen**

(Adapted from Corrymeela Worshipbook)

Suggestions for the Prayers of Intercession

- These should reflect the local situation of the worshipping community. It might be a worthwhile exercise to invite a small group to craft these following a time of reflection about the particular challenges and opportunities in the local area.
- A display of appropriate 'boundaries' or areas of concern could be used as the focus for prayer. This could also be done as a power point presentation using images from the local area.
- With preparation the prayers could be led by various groups which make up parish life and could include the parish school where appropriate.
- As Hard Gospel Sunday is at the beginning of the Academic Year it might be an opportunity to encourage local schools and groups to look at their neighbourhood and to initiate contact with a new neighbour both within and without the school community.
- The prayers should be an honest engagement with the reality in the parish community (even if that is somewhat uncomfortable) but should also identify ways of expressing thanks to God for the creative and natural ways we do celebrate diversity and maybe highlight often 'unsung' work that goes on.
- A challenging conclusion to the prayers might be to use the following from the Wild Goose Resource Group.

Let us pray for the breaking in of God's kingdom in our world today.

Lord God, because Jesus has taught us to trust you in all things, we hold to his word and share his plea:

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Where nations budget for war, while Christ says, 'Put up your sword':

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Where countries waste food and covet fashion, while Christ says, 'I was hungry... I was thirsty...':

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Where powerful governments claim their policies are heaven blessed, while scripture states that God helps the powerless:

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Where Christians seek the kingdom in the shape of their own church, as if Christ had come to build and not to break barriers:

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Where women who speak up for their dignity are treated with scorn or contempt:

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Where men try hard to be tough, because they're afraid to be tender:

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Where we, obsessed with being adult, forget to become like children:

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Where our prayers falter, our faith weakens, our light grows dim:

Where Jesus Christ calls us:

Your kingdom, come, your will be done.

Lord God,
you have declared that your kingdom is among us.
Open our ears to hear it,
our hands to serve it,
our hearts to hold it.

This we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen**

Or again from the same source:

In you, gracious God,
the widowed find a carer,
the orphaned find a parent,
the fearful find a friend.

In you,
the wounded find a healer,
the penitent find a pardoner,
the burdened find a counsellor.

In you,
the miserly find a beggar,
the despondent find a laughter-maker,
the legalists find a rule-breaker.

In you, Jesus Christ,
we meet our maker
and our match.

And if some need to say, 'Help me'
and if some need to say, 'Save me'
and if some need to say, 'Hold me'
and if some need to say, 'Forgive me'
then let these be said no(w?)
in confidence
by us.

(silence)

O Christ,
in whose heart is both welcome and warning,
say to us,
do to us,
reveal within us,
the things that will make us whole.
And we will wait;
and we will praise you. **Amen**

Prayer for Reconciliation

God of compassion and mercy, we bring to you our divided society and our broken world, seeking your healing and transforming grace.

It is easy for us to point the finger at others, yet we know that we all need your forgiveness; so we lift into your presence today, not only the victims of our conflicts, (discrimination, or another appropriate word or phrase) but also those we have called enemies.

Break down the walls of hatred, distrust and bitterness and open a way for us to reach one another in truth and love. Enable us to build a society where all can belong; to share our gifts in mutual respect and to seek for the new future which you offer us, through Jesus Christ. **Amen**

(From Travelling the Road of Faith, Worship resources from the Corrymeela Community)

Prayer for a Shared Future

One: Give us, God a vision of our society as your love would make it:
A society where the weak are protected rather than exploited,

MANY: AND NONE ARE LEFT BEHIND OR LEFT OUT.

One: A society where the benefits and resources of the earth are shared responsibly,

MANY: AND EVERYONE CAN ENJOY THEM.

One: A society where different races and cultures live in tolerance and mutual respect,

MANY: AND DISAGREEMENTS ARE ADDRESSED THROUGH DIALOGUE.

One: A society where peace is built with justice,

MANY: AND JUSTICE IS GUIDED BY LOVE.

One: A society where fear is replaced by trust,

MANY: AND SECURITY COMES FROM KNOWING AND LOOKING AFTER EACH OTHERS INTERESTS, NOT JUST OUR OWN.

One: A society where healing of the hurts of the past,

MANY: COMES THROUGH SHARING NEW AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH EACH OTHER.

One: A society where responsibility for building and sustaining good relations,

MANY: IS OWNED AND ACTED UPON BY ALL.

One: And through your Spirit, give us courage and inspiration to live into such a shared future, as followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, our Lord and Saviour.

MANY: AMEN

(Written for Presbyterian Church in Ireland peacemaking conference 2006.) Reduce number of petitions.)

Commission

At the end of the service a commission could be used. There are various suggestions such as the Commission that is used at Confirmation or the Renewal of Baptismal Vows on p 389 or p.400 of the BCP.

Closing response:

(Once again from the Wild Goose Resource Group)

The cross

We shall take it;

the bread

We shall break it;

the pain

We shall bear it;

the joy

We shall share it;

the Gospel,

We shall live it;

the love,

We shall give it;

the light,

We shall cherish it;

the darkness,

God shall perish it.

Blessing:

Appropriately chosen to reflect the worship.

Suggested Hymns

In numerical order from Church Hymnal (5th Edition)

9	There's a wideness in God's mercy
118	Behold the mountain of the Lord
421	I come with Joy a child of God
495	Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love
499	When I needed a neighbour were you there?
500	Would you walk by on the other side?
515	A new commandment I give unto you
517	Brother, sister, let me serve you
523	Help us to help each other, Lord,
525	Let there be love shared among us
605	Will you come and follow me
634	Love divine, all loves excelling

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Some of the items from Corrymeela appear in 'Travelling the Road of Faith, Worship Resources from the Corrymeela Community', available from Corrymeela House, 8 Upper Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NT. The others are from older resources now out of print.

Some ways to build complimentary activities into this day and the days before and after Hard Gospel Sunday:

- Place the multi-lingual welcome poster included with this pack where it will catch worshippers eyes as they arrive.
- Invite a guest preacher / speaker from another denomination; or ethnic group.
- Invite representatives from diverse backgrounds to read lessons; prayers, etc. or to share special music.
- Pick up the same theme in your Bible Class, Sunday School, Youth Fellowships and other small groups meeting on this Sunday or during the week.
- Plan a friendship meal with neighbours from diverse backgrounds after the service or in the evening - especially those you have not yet met.
- Make sure those collecting the offering reflect the diversity of the parish (gender, ages, social backgrounds, ethnic diversity).
- Make sure a new edition of the Hard Gospel Bulletin is available to be distributed to those attending.
- Set up displays about "Our Neighbours in _____"
- Have one or more people who took part in the Hard Gospel course "Loving Our Neighbours" share something about it with the congregation.
- Use the occasion to launch / recruit for a "Reflect and Act" course or "Loving our Neighbours," if it has not already been used in your parish. See the Hard Gospel website for details.
- Provide an opportunity for worshippers (or those present at a small group meeting or friendship meal) to write down or share one small step they are committing themselves to take in the week ahead to reach out to an individual or group from a different background.
- Link your celebration of Hard Gospel Sunday to Racial Justice Sunday promoted by Churches together in Britain and Ireland. More details from <http://www.cix.co.uk/~ctbi/ccrj>

Whatever worship and additional activities you plan, we hope that you will use Hard Gospel Sunday as an occasion to inform, inspire, challenge, and invite commitment from a wide cross-section of your parish membership and as an opportunity to engage directly in loving your neighbours.