

Love your neighbour this

Lent

▶▶▶▶ Reflection

Reg charity no 299717 (England) and SC049792 (Scotland)

SEND
A COW



Introduction

Throughout Send a Cow's Lent appeal, you will have read about Rose, a refugee who fled conflict in her home country and arrived in Uganda with nothing. She struggled to feed her family. However, a local Ugandan family gave her a piece of their own land so she could start to grow food. They gave from what little they had. What a beautiful example of loving your neighbour as yourself!

Take a moment to reflect on what is important to you in life.



Bible Verse: Matthew 22: 36 –39

36 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' 37 He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Reflection

Lent is a time of stripping back the trappings and finery of life and recognising and reflecting on what is truly important. It's rather like looking at the nakedness of a fruit tree in winter without its covering of leaves, or the beauty of its flowers or the hope of its fruit. All you can see is the trunk and branches that give the tree its framework, and allow the life and fruitfulness of the tree to be sustained.

Jesus pares back the essentials of how we are to live to just two very similar commandments which are essentially to Love the Lord your God in every way that you can and to love others as yourself. These two priorities give us the framework for everything else to build on.

For Christians it is an essential order to put God first. It is God who gives us the structure to truly love our neighbour and ourselves. It is God, who



has created each of us differently and uniquely. But it's a very human tendency to find others who think and perhaps look like us, and stick together with them. We often feel safer that way. Their similarity to us helps us feel better about ourselves and the way we view the world.

Jesus priority to love your neighbour as yourself assumes a love of self that we don't always see in the West. While it's common to be self-centred, often overly so, self-love is often absent. It's not unusual to see self-absorption and self-loathing going hand in hand. But God created us as we are. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, each with unique gifts and a unique place in the world. Each loved by him more than we can ever know.

But God didn't just create us. We are made in God's image. Every single person, no matter how different to us, bears God's image. They too are God's beloved son or daughter, exactly as we are. When we consider God's love for us and for them, we start to look at our similarities rather than our differences. We begin to value our differences and allow them to challenge us to see things in a new way, and in that we find we grow.

There is a lovely African concept called 'Ubuntu', which a Zambian friend once explained to me as

'I am, because you are'. I can be me, because you are you. It holds the importance of each person and concludes that, in a community, everyone can only be as happy as the least happy person of the group. It's a philosophy that makes sharing what you have with those around you in need an imperative. It's beautifully illustrated by Rose's story and the hospitality she found with a Ugandan family, despite them having barely enough for their own needs in the first place. Yet in their sharing they will find joy and strength.

Ubuntu is a wonderful understanding of our interconnectedness and interdependency, rather like the way the leaves, flowers and fruits grow on a tree. Of course, trees don't grow in isolation. They are firmly rooted in the soil of the earth, in God's creation. We are only just beginning to really realise quite how important they are to us, not just for the beauty, shade, fruit or timber that they provide, but as the lungs of the whole earth.

Coronavirus has highlighted just how important our lungs are, as if we had somehow forgotten. We are beginning to understand the importance of the lungs of the earth in reducing the effects of climate change that we are seeing around the world.



Points for further reflection

- When have you met with someone who is quite different to yourself and allowed their view of life to challenge yours? What did you learn?
- The generosity of the Ugandan family to Rose and her family is both beautiful and deeply challenging to many of us in the West. What holds you back from sharing more freely?
- If you were a tree, what type of tree would you be? What does that say about you?
- How do the things you hold as important in how you live agree or differ with Jesus' priorities?
- We live in a time and place dominated by perfect images of people with 'everything'. Eleanor Roosevelt once said 'Comparison is the thief of joy'. How does modern media and the pressures of our society rob you of your sense of worth? How can you replace those views with God's love of you?



Written by Rev'd Debbie Pow,
Chaplain to Send a Cow