

Agendas

We all have them, of course we do. Each one is peculiarly individual, and they can do us great damage. When we think about relationships, the essential thing vital to them is trust. It doesn't really matter whether we are talking intimate or casual, unless it is built on trust then somehow it is doomed from the start, and even if it seems to work and remain intact something someday is going to happen that will rip it apart and expose it for what it was.

If we seek to impose our own agendas as being the most important element of a relationship, then what is it we are looking to achieve? Certainly it isn't the building up of the other. What is happening is that I'm on the look out for what I can get out of it, as opposed to what I can offer as gift to enhance the other person. The upshot is then that I stop thinking beyond anything other than my own needs and my own wants. The relationship becomes the vehicle by which my agenda comes to fruition, and as a consequence the end justifies the means. Whatever gets in the way of what I want has to justify itself in that light. If it strengthens and enhances my prospects then all well and good and I'll run with it. If it damages those prospects, then sorry it's off the menu and to be thrown into the bin.

The lawyer in today's gospel has an agenda alright and it's plain to see what it is. He wants to disconcert Jesus; in other words he wants to put Jesus on the spot and make him part of his own plan of self aggrandisement. I always think that his "anxiety to justify himself" is simply a mask to hide what is really at the heart of his follow up question "and who is my neighbour" It reminds me of Pilate's mocking retort to Jesus "Truth, what is that?" It is as if the lawyer is saying that his own agenda is sufficient to enable him to determine who his neighbour is, and what he wants Jesus to do is to confirm his pathway as being absolutely the right one. He tells Jesus the words which he thinks Jesus wants to hear, but the response of Jesus falls short of the answer he craves. He likes the affirmation: *You have answered right* but he is then stumped by the command: *Do this and life is yours*. It is as if his agenda hasn't factored that command in at all, so Jesus spells it out for him in the famous story and suddenly his world is blown apart.

How like the priest and the Levite we are! Our willingness to put trust at the heart of all our relationships is tested every day as events confront us with the dilemma faced by those two characters in the story. Can I set aside my own agenda to deal with someone else? Immediately we ask what will be the cost to me. Look at what the Samaritan says – he ignores the cost and concentrates totally on helping and assisting his fellow human who is in need. It's easy to sound sanctimonious about this story, but when Jesus puts the final question to the lawyer he does so without any sense of sentimentality. Jesus has given the lawyer an extreme image that he knew would disconcert him. He has done so purposely to shake him out of his own smug comfort. Jesus is telling him that the world isn't just about what we want and what we desire and of how we are going to achieve it. No the world is about recognising the human dignity of each person and seeing in each person's face an image that is made up of a love that dwelt among us, unknown and unseen because of our own agendas.