

# The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

## Sermon

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### **Sunday 1 October 2023: Robert Siekierkowski**

So what does it mean to be a Christian? In our second reading of Paul to the Philippians it is clearly stated: "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others; be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves; don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too; you must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

And of course Christ showed us the way through his actions. Even though he is God, as a man he didn't take advantage of this for his own sake but only to help others. The healing of the sick and the raising of the dead are just some incredible examples. He gained no personal benefit from these actions. Often they were done quietly with few witnesses. He did not do these things for his own glory and gratification.

So as a Christian, we must be prepared to help anyone who is in real need of it. Now, that is a problem; how can we be sure that a person is in real need of help? Well often it is easy as we see and hear news reports of the terrible disasters that happen to people around the world such as the recent earthquake in Morocco and the flooding in Libya. We can easily empathise as we listen to individual stories of suffering and we like to help, often by donating money to a dedicated charity.

On the other hand, we may simply pass someone begging in the street. How can we be sure this person is in need of genuine help, or is this a professional beggar? These people have been reported to earn up to £300 a day on people's kindness? Well, we could just buy them a coffee or a sandwich rather than give money; but better still, join a voluntary group that care for the homeless such as St Georges Crypt or Homeless Street Angels. With these groups you will get support and you will be more purposeful.

We also see stories of migrants putting their lives at risk crossing the Channel and Mediterranean to find a better and safer life in another country. We may have mixed feelings about these people. We are horrified at the number of deaths that occur in their journey, but then, perhaps, we are less charitable to those that survive the journey as we see them as an economic burden to our country through housing them in hotel rooms and feeding them. Often we do not hear their personal stories that have led them to migrate. As a result we may show less empathy towards them and hence understanding.

But migrants do not have to be a burden, as the town of Camini has discovered. I happen to hear this remarkable story broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in the

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programme "From our own Correspondent". Camini sits in the Calabria region of Italy. In the 1990's much of the population left to find work in larger towns and cities, as they found no work opportunities in Camini. The town began to die; buildings were empty and crumbling due to lack of maintenance.

It became almost a ghost town. In 2016 the situation changed. The inhabitants agreed to be part of a government-run immigrant settlement plan. Today, migrants from Afghanistan, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, South Sudan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Syria make up 30% of the population. The EuroCoop Camini receives €35 per day per migrant to help cover their daily needs and their accommodation. The migrants are working in renovating the town buildings and are setting up small cottage industries in ceramics, woodworking and clothing, to name a few. Before the migrants came, the town school was going to close due to lack of children, now it is thriving for the benefit of all children. The economy in the town is improving and now has their first cash point machine installed to improve the much needed easy access to cash. In a café in the square, Italians and migrants sit together enjoying meals cooked by Italian and Lebanese chefs. The children play world cup games on the table football machines; each, in good nature, cheering their country's team. Importantly the local inhabitants have learned to listen to the migrants and understand the circumstances which have led them to Camini. They now value their contribution to the town. They have learned to empathise and realise that the newcomers are not "scroungers or criminals" but important members of their community. As the migrants become more able to support themselves and look to become citizens of their new found country, the government funding will reduce and eventually finish.

The migrant situation isn't our only issue. Due to the current economic climate, donations to food banks are still down all over the country, but the demand for food has increased as more and more families struggle to feed themselves. St Aidan's FoodShare is struggling to meet their food demand. Rents, gas and electricity have increased, reducing the amount of money that can be spent on food. If you're still living comfortably, could you not afford to give more to the food bank? Finding enough food to eat is a human primary driving force, especially if you are half starved. Some children are dealing in drugs as an easy way of making money to buy food for the family table; but there is then the danger that they become addicted to drugs and follow a life of crime. We hear of the increase of 'County Lines' involving many young children dealing in drugs run by gangs. We like to think we are building a better society but in truth the story is remarkably similar to the time Charles Dickens wrote Oliver Twist in the

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1830s where Fagan ran a thieving gang of children. These children could not see an alternative way to survive. We may say we have "Social Care Services" now, but due to underfunding and increase demand they are struggling to cope. So increasingly, people are looking to neighbours and voluntary care groups for help.

What is empathy? According to the Oxford dictionary, it is "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another"

So as a Christian we need to be prepared to look and listen to people, to understand their needs, to have empathy in order to be better equipped to help them.

I remind you again of what Paul wrote to the Philippians "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

I leave you with this thought;

Donald Trump walks into a bar and is surprised to see that the bartender is a Genie

The Genie says "what'll you have?" Trump says "give me something I'll regret in the morning." So the Genie gives him a conscience, empathy, and humility.