



At the annual Province of Hertfordshire Service of Praise held at Waltham Abbey on 19th May 2024, following the reading of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the following Homily was given by
**E.Kt. Rev'd Niall Johnston
Deputy Great Almoner.**

E.Kt. Rev'd Niall Johnston with Rt. E. Kt. Alastair White the Provincial Prior for Hertfordshire.



Many of you will know that I am passionate about the work of the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group. After an absence of six months caused by the atrocity that was the terrorist attack on 7 October and subsequent events, I was able to visit the Holy Land a few weeks ago and I will be there again next week.

The Chief Executive, Dr Ahmad Ma'ali, has asked me to send you his greetings and both he and I are grateful for the concern that your Province has expressed since 7 October for the dedicated team who work at all six of the Eye Hospital sites.

Our Gaza staff, including Maysoun, the nurse whom you sponsor, are sheltering in Rafah and Deir El Balah (in the south of the Gaza Strip) and remain unharmed, at least physically, but two nurses have died, along with family members of other staff. So this afternoon, I want to look at our Gospel reading in the context of your support for the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group.

Samaria is nestled between the Sea of Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. The Jordan River lies east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. When the Kingdom of Israel split, Samaria became the capital of the north, while Jerusalem got the title of the capital of the south. There has been a great deal of racism and prejudice throughout history between Jewish people and Samaritans. On their way to Galilee, most Jewish people travelled the long way around to avoid going through or near Samaria.

We can learn a great deal from Samaria as Jesus uses it to teach us important lessons. Whether it be to welcome him into our hearts like the woman at the well or to do good for others like the good Samaritan. The biblical significance of Samaria teaches us crucial lessons about ourselves and our faith.

The Samaritan had every reason to pass by this Jewish man but responds differently and Jesus tells this story to illustrate what it means to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself’.

So how did the Samaritan do just that? Well, he chose to see the need. This man was moved in his soul – when he saw the injured man, he took pity on him. He didn’t close his eyes to the need like the others and like so many people do today. No, he chose to see the need. That’s what Jesus does – He sees the need. You know, loving God with everything means allowing Him to touch our emotions and saturate our souls with compassion so that, when we see broken humanity, the love of Christ wells up and causes us to respond rather than retreat.

Do we close our eyes out of fear or open our eyes in faith that God can use us to bring healing into someone's life?

Since 7 October, working with the London SJEHG office, Great Priory and London Support (and if you don't know what that is, ask your Provincial Prior or London's Provincial Vice-Chancellor who is with us today) I have tried to provide updates on the Eye Hospital's work across the Holy Land so that you can hold the staff team in your prayers.

Many of you have contributed to the SJEHG Gaza Appeal in addition to your ongoing support for your own Centenary Appeal. Your prayerful support has meant much to the staff, especially in Gaza, with whom we have been in constant touch. Depressing though the news has been over the past seven months, I thank you for not having turned away or closed your eyes to the suffering, especially of Palestinian Christians

But it wasn't enough to see the need and have pity, the Samaritan chose to answer the cry and do something about it. It's one thing to think we have faith but faith without deeds is not faith. We need to love God with our minds because when we love God with our minds it involves a conscious act of the will. You can be moved by what you see on the news, or what you hear today but to love God with our minds is to yield our minds to Him and be obedient to His will. The Gospel says that the Samaritan bandaged the injured man's wounds pouring on oil and wine. He brought comfort to one in need. Proverbs 21:13 says, 'If a man shuts his ear to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered'. This Samaritan was aware of the danger and the inconvenience, but he reached out anyway.

I am delighted to report that the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group have recommenced services in Gaza as part of a three-phase emergency medical response plan.

Phase One, which started on the 20th of April, involved setting up three aid stations in the south and middle parts of the Strip in partnership with other humanitarian health care providers. Just last week, a fourth aid station has started work in the main Eye Hospital building in north Gaza, which is currently providing shelter for Displaced Persons. The aid station services include vision screening, comprehensive eye examinations, treatment of eye infections and inflammations, treatment of chronic diseases such as glaucoma, suturing and dressing of wounds; as of Friday, some 2,000 patients have been seen.

The Samaritan didn't just patch the man up on the side of the road, but he put him on his donkey and took him to an inn where he took care of him. Not only that, but he was willing to pay the price by giving two day's wages and then promising to pay for any further expenses when he came back. You know, when we love God with all our strength we will follow through in our commitment by doing whatever it takes. Sometimes we start with good intentions but so often we become half- hearted and fail to complete the work.

Phases Two and Three will focus on the prevention of blindness and treatment of Diabetic Retinopathy and rehabilitating and re-equipping the hospital in Gaza City. The Eye Hospital is most grateful to national and international humanitarian partners who have enabled them to implement this logistically challenging plan. Phase 2 will commence in the coming months once the appropriate funds have been secured.

I encourage you today – don't give up on your sponsored nurse, Maysoun, when it gets tough for you financially, don't give up on the Eye Hospital team because you are not seeing any hope in the Holy Land; in your financial support for your Centenary Appeal and, most importantly, your prayerful support for the Eye Hospital staff and their work, press through and just as you started well, finish well.

The Samaritan was the key to bringing life; he wasn't hindered by the difference of the wounded man, he had the heart to make a difference to that man. He was willing to cross political, racial, cultural and social barriers and risk prejudices and the fear of the unknown because he saw someone with a need and he had the resources to meet that need.

When we love God with all our hearts then nothing we have will be held back but will be freely available for the Lord to use. Our time, our money, our abilities, our whole lives. If you are a Christian today then Christ is living in you, an incredible treasure within us that needs to be shared with others that they might discover His love and power too.

The Samaritan gave his time, his touch and his treasure to restore a broken person and as Christians we are called to:

- feel the need of the broken;
- kneel beside our sisters and brothers with humility;
- heal wounds, physical and emotional;
- bring hope to the hopeless; and
- partner with others to bring healing just as the Samaritan equipped the inn-keeper to do the job.

May God bless you all and may God continue to bless the work of the Eye Hospital Group.

Almighty God,

*whose blessed Son Jesus Christ went about doing good
and healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people;
bless, we beseech thee, the work of the St John Eye Hospital Group.
Especially accept our thanks for its work
done with skill and faithfulness
during this troubled time;
and grant that it may continue to be a centre of light and healing
to all who come within its walls and to those touched by its outreach;
through Him who is the Light of the World and the Great Physician,
even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*



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