

# Vicar's Sermon

**Date :** Sun 13/04/2008  
**Title :** The meaning of Good.  
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**Subject :** How Jesus showed us the true meaning of being Good.

In this passage from John's Gospel Jesus famously describes Himself as "the good shepherd". It's interesting to look at the word good and ask ourselves what it means. Good, of course, is one of those words with several different meanings depending upon the context in which it is used. Firstly, it means virtuous. When I was a little boy I was often told to be "a good lad": in other words, well behaved. Good is to do the right thing: to conform to what society expects of you: to remember your pleases and your thankyou's!

And there can be no doubt that Jesus was good in this respect. "Christian children all must be mild, obedient, good as He". And not just children, of course, but adults as well. In many ways Jesus did conform to the rules and expectations of His day. "He grew in stature and in favour with God and man." He celebrated the Passover: He went regularly to the synagogue where on one famous occasion He read from the prophet Isaiah. He said Himself "I have not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it." Jesus was not an anarchist and He did not seek to overturn the norms of society for the sake of it.

But good has other meanings as well. You sometimes hear people say "that was a good thing to do" by which they mean that it was a positive, kind and loving thing to do. To be good to someone is to be thoughtful, sensitive, considerate and helpful and, in fact, very often to put the needs of others before your own. I'm very privileged in having a "good mother-in-law" in that not only has she been very kind to me but she faithfully and lovingly looked after her husband who was confined to a wheelchair from the age of 38 years. Some people at the time encouraged her to begin a new life but such a thought was contrary to her genuine loving nature and she didn't even contemplate it.

And such goodness is certainly exemplified in the nature and life of Jesus: in fact He is better than any person who has ever lived because although He was tempted in every way like we are yet He was without sin. Jesus had the love and goodness of God Himself coursing through His veins. "Jesus good above all other: gentle child of gentle mother" "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin: He only could unlock the gate of life and let us in." Jesus showed remarkable kindness and goodness and a complete empathy with those in need and suffering. We often hear the phrase "He looked with compassion on them" and what pure love must have been reflected in the eyes of Jesus! Eyes, in fact, that literally wept with compassion as when He gazed out over Jerusalem or when He stood at the entrance to the tomb of His friend Lazarus. All of the miracles of Jesus were born out of this amazing love and goodness.

And, of course, His love was the ultimate in self-sacrifice as when he suffered and died on the Cross: not for His own sake but for ours. An essential part of true goodness is the willingness to put yourself out for others and to give without counting the cost. On Remembrance Day we often equate the sacrifice of the soldiers with the sacrifice of Jesus: "they gave their yesterdays for our todays and tomorrows" and yet nothing, of course, could equal the sacrifice of God's own Son who even as they hammered in the nails cried "Father forgive them!" No greater statement of pure goodness has ever been heard on anyone's lips either before or since.

But, finally, there's another interpretation of the word good that denotes ability or skill. We often say "yes, he or she are very good at that." In that they have a natural gift or talent.

We might ask ourselves, therefore, what was Jesus good at? And for me the answer to that would be empathy and compassion. A literally God-given ability to put Himself in the position of others especially those who were rejected and on the fringes of society: the outcasts who were not "good" in any accepted sense. And these were, in fact, the sheep of His pasture who responded to His

call. Jesus was the Good Shepherd who called the dregs of society: the lost sheep who were scattered and He brought them to Himself. They knew His voice and in His voice they heard the call of acceptance, forgiveness and a new way of life.

And the most ironical thing is that this made Jesus “no good” in the eyes of the “good” of society: the respectable, the virtuous, the totally conformist. Jesus did conform in many ways but when it came to compassion He was totally uncompromising in his condemnation of pride, arrogance and self-righteousness and this, to a large extent, is what put Him on the Cross. It wasn't the wicked people of His day who caused His suffering, execution and death but the good and righteous people who thought themselves a cut-above the Son of God.

And so where does that leave us with our goodness? Perhaps realising that we have no goodness at all except that which is conferred upon us by our one and only Good Shepherd.

Amen.

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