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An art form I greatly admire is photography. Many major events of the last century have been preserved through photographs that have captured forever moments when history changed. Who could forget the iconic image of a sailor kissing a nurse in New York's Times Square on VJ Day? Or the Soviet flag being raised over the Reichstag after the fall of Berlin? Or the scene of devastation surrounding the severed tail fin of an Air New Zealand DC10 on Mt Erebus? No wonder is often said that a picture paints a thousand words.

Several photographs I saw that especially moved me recorded something that happened during a time of unrest in Cairo in 2011. A group of Christians joined hands and faced outwards, surrounding hundreds of Muslims protesters as they knelt in prayer. What made this even more remarkable was that only a month earlier, 23 Coptic

Christians had been killed in a bombing in Alexandria. Nevine Zaki, who took the photographs, reported that, “Some Muslims have been guarding Coptic churches while Christians pray, and on Friday, Christians were guarding the mosques while Muslims prayed.”¹

These were not isolated incidents; I very recently read that in Cameroon, Christians guard mosques on Fridays while Muslims pray. And Muslims return the favour, protecting churches during Sunday services.² I have read of Christians building mosques for Muslims, and I have read of Muslims building churches for Christians.

Today’s gospel reading primarily comprises the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which is arguably the most well-known and best-loved of all of Jesus’ parables. And for good reason too. But today I want to focus on the conversation that leads up to Jesus telling this beautiful story. Jesus is approached by a man, who is variously described as a lawyer, or a teacher of or expert in the Law, depending on which Bible translation you are using. ‘The Law’ does not refer to any civic law, but the Torah, which comprises what we call the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy in the Older Testament.

In Jesus’ day, there is no clear consensus on what constitutes scripture, as different Jewish sects have different views on which documents they accept: the Pharisees accept the Prophets and the Writings, while the Sadducees do not. But all Jews accept the Law, or the Torah.

Today’s gospel reading encapsulates the very heart of Jesus teachings. He gives us two simple commandments: to love God, and

to love others. In the Older Testament, these two commandments are in completely separate books of the Law. It takes Jesus to bring them together, and show that it is through loving others that we can demonstrate we love God.

Jesus had earlier declared, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.”³

Fulfilling the law and the prophets is achieved by following two simple commandments: to love God, and to love others. And I would suggest ‘that these two are so powerfully linked that it is by showing our love for others that we show our love for God.

But when we fail to follow these two simple commandments, we are rejecting Jesus’ quintessential teaching, and thereby rejecting God’s grace. When we act unlovingly towards others, we act unlovingly towards God.

There was only one way for us to be reconciled, and that was for God to become fully human, even though this meant experiencing the joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, and high hopes and broken dreams that are part of human life. Including dying. That is why Jesus died for us. And when he died on the cross, he showed what love looked like in action. But ultimately, he triumphed over his death with his resurrection, and his resurrection brings us hope that we too may share in it.

The conversation between Jesus and the expert in the Law is also found in the Gospels according to St Matthew and St Mark. The version contained in the Gospel according to St Luke, which we heard today, differs in that it is the expert in the Law who brings together

loving God and loving others.⁴ A good teacher is one who inspires us to come up with answers for ourselves, and that is precisely what happens here, with Jesus, of course, being the good teacher.

However, while our expert in the law has correctly answered Jesus by telling him of our obligation to love God and love our neighbours, he wants Jesus to tell him who his neighbour is. And thanks to his question, Jesus gives us the wonderful Parable of the Good Samaritan. I am not going to dwell on the actual parable, other than to remind you that, as so often happens with Jesus' teachings, he turns social convention upside down. Two supposedly holy men refuse to help the stricken traveller, but the one who does help him is a Samaritan, a despised enemy of the Jews.

Now let us go back to the Christians and Muslims protecting each other in Egypt, Cameroon and other places. These are not meaningless gestures. They bring light where there is darkness, and they give hope where there is despair. And I believe that when we show love to others, we reveal the Christ to the world, and proclaim the coming of God's kingdom.

We may claim to be followers of the Christ, but our actions speak louder than our words.

When we give food to the hungry, refresh the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit people in prison, we reveal the Christ.

When we show compassion to the last, the lost, and the least, when we fulfil our obligations to care for God's creation, and we make an

effort to deal with the suffering of children who live in poverty, we reveal the Christ.

And when we follow those two simple commandments, and love God and love others, we reveal the Christ. And show we are indeed whom we claim to be.

Darryl Ward

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<http://theword.tk>

¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1353330/Egypt-protests-Christians-join-hands-protect-Muslims-pray-Cairo-protests.html>

² <http://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/cameroon-christians-protect-mosques-on-friday-muslims-guard-churches-on-sunday/>

³ Matthew 5:17

⁴ Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:26-27