



Scripture in Action



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Jesus of Nazareth was an itinerant prophet and teacher in Galilee, an area of the Roman Province of Judaea, in the closing century of second Temple Judaism.

By “prophet” I mean a person who gives wise counsel, thus helping to shape the future in a positive way, rather than the meaning more often ascribed to the word as referring to someone who miraculously foresees the future.

His philosophy of kindness to all, of treating others as you would have them treat you, and of unconditional forgiveness was revolutionary!

Its strength belies its simplicity. And it also stands in contrast to the apocalyptic eschatology of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist came first, bringing with him the Jewish theology of messianic end times. Certainly, Jesus had heard of John the Baptist, and we know that Jesus came to John to be baptised. But what Jesus preached was a social morality that everyone was called upon to put into practice right here, right now. I doubt that Jesus would have stood around on the Sabbath waving his hands in the air. He would have been out amongst the people, especially the poor, the down-trodden, the misfits.

What better place for each of us to practice a Christ-like life than in our own neighbourhood, doing what we are capable of according to Christian principles.

I am going to illustrate this point by again referring to my mother, Joan Branford, but this time before her ischaemic stroke. Joan was living in a retirement village. Many of her neighbours were also single women, most of them widows like her. But many of her neighbours had physical incapacities. So, Joan came up with a wonderfully simple but effective plan.

Joan was an early riser and was quite happy to go for a walk around her neighbours' units and pick up their newspapers and place them on a bench or whatever next to their front doors. This meant that when the neighbour rose, they could just open their door and grab their paper. There was no bending down or searching under bushes for the paper.

But there was another great benefit. If Joan noticed later in the day that there was a paper still left uncollected from where she had placed it in the morning, then Joan would raise an alarm, and a welfare check ensued. On the other hand, if a neighbour came out one morning and the paper was not in its convenient spot, then Joan had not been on her round. They could raise an alarm for Joan.

This simple, but caring, practice went on for ages, until that fateful morning when the neighbours found that their papers had not been picked up for them. That was the day after Joan's ischaemic stroke and her journey to the aged-care facility.

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