

# Mercy MOMENTS



## Why Them and Not Me?

**Why them and not me? Pope Francis asked this question in his TED Talk on April 25 this year. “I could have very well ended up among today’s discarded people” (the sick, the imprisoned, those seeking refuge, those persecuted and terrorised), he said. So he asks himself each day: what hand of fate, what sliding door moment, has brought him to the life he has?**

Pope Francis’ question is a reversal of the often-heard cry for attention and for opportunity in our world – “what about me?” We hear it all the time argued for in the name of balance and equality, but Francis’ question challenges all who enjoy the privileges of prosperity and freedom to think again about the life they have.

Why them and not me? It is a question that is haunting for prosperous Western societies like ours. Asked consciously or not, it can lead to energetic and life-giving generosity and also to harsh judgement, anger and conflict. Maybe both responses come from the anxiety that this question arouses.

One of the most harrowing stories from the recent and shocking attack on London Bridge was that of Australian nurse, Kirsty Boden, who ran towards the danger to assist those who had been injured and was herself then murdered. Popular culture has a name for the person who is not afraid to reach out, who is not afraid to ask “why them and not me?” It is “the Good Samaritan”.

The idea of the person who goes to help the stranger in need is embedded in the imagination of a good world and people of all faiths, and of none, who use it to capture the goodness of such action – whether they know the parable or not.

Indeed, it is idealised, expressed always in a way that this is how we would all like to be. And yet, there is so much that happens that is at odds with this ideal.

Witness the push-back against generosity and openness in this country, manifested in campaigns against refugee numbers in Australia, in the increasing prominence and the ugliness of so-called patriotic, white supremacist movements, in diminishing foreign aid in the Federal government budget that is not challenged, in stricter rules for English language proficiency for Australian citizenship – while at the same time, funding for English language teaching is cut.

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In the aftermath of the terrible events in the UK, fear and scepticism about the other, the stranger, seem to have ratcheted up once again. When we wonder at the words and actions of those who seek to marginalise and destroy the ‘other’, perhaps fear of the answer to Pope Francis’ question is why they lack the tenderness that would be both liberating and constructive. Yes, tenderness. It is, says Francis, “the path of choice for the strongest, most courageous men and women”. Tenderness is “being on the same level as the other”. It “is not weakness; it is fortitude”.

**Source:** This is an edited version of an article first published in *The Good Oil*, the e-magazine of the Good Samaritan Sisters. The full article can be read here <http://www.goodsams.org.au/article/why-them-and-not-me>. The author of this article, **Leonie Keaney**, is Executive Director of *Good Samaritan Education*, the ecclesial community established in 2011 to oversee the ethos, mission and stewardship of the ten incorporated Good Samaritan Colleges in Australia.

### REFLECTION

- > Why them and not me – the question invites us to pause and consider the many blessings that we enjoy.
- > How can you cultivate a spirit of gratitude in your family or place of work?
- > Who are the Good Samaritans in your life?