

Who Is My Neighbor?

Parables of Jesus: Part 6 “Who Is My Neighbor?”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 26, 2021

18th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Luke 10:25-37

Reflection: Psalm 67

Greeting: Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

Prayer: Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.
(*Psalm 67 NRSV**)

We read the words of Psalm 67 and we hear of God’s grace and blessing. We hear about God’s saving power. Calls to let all people praise God for his continued blessings. That we must only look around to see God’s love for us. How do you experience God’s love and blessing? In what ways do you share those blessings with others? How do you show your praise for the Lord? How do you share the joy that Christ gives you? How can we share in the hope of Christ’s redeeming grace?

Prayer: O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to remember your love in all things and help us to love each other as you have loved us. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus’ name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Luke chapter 10 verses 25 through 37.

A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?" He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live." But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, 'Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.' What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?" Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week's parable is a rather familiar one, and in it we get a question that doesn't actually get answered. And for me that unanswered question was the thing that drew me in. In our scripture reading, we have a legal expert. And the Scripture tells us that he's testing Jesus. He does this by asking a question. "What must I do to gain eternal life?" And Jesus answers this question with a question. "What's written in the Law? How do you see it?" So, the expert replies, "Well, love God with all that you have and love your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus tells him that he's got the right answer. "Do this and you will live." Now, that exchange is straightforward enough, but it's this next question that gives us pause. The legal expert says, "Well, okay. But who is my neighbor?" Now the reason that this question seems interesting is because it says that you're supposed to love your neighbor as yourself. Well then, who is it, I'm supposed to love? And this is a good question because the answer has to be rather important. It leads to eternal life. If I am to love my neighbor, who is my neighbor? So, Jesus replies with a parable. And in this parable, we have a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he's robbed on the road, beaten and left for dead. A priest is traveling on the same road. When he sees him, he crosses over, goes to the other side, and keeps going. Then a Levite come by, sees the injured man goes to their side of the road and walks on by. And then a Samaritan, the outsider

of outsiders, is on a journey. When he sees the man, he's moved with compassion. The Samaritan bandages his wounds, tends to his injuries, and puts him on his own donkey. He then brings him to an inn and takes care of the man there. The next day, he gives the innkeeper two days wages, and says take care of this guy. When I come back, I'll pay for any additional costs.

Now what's interesting is, so far, the question hasn't been answered. But that's where the parable ends. And Jesus looks back to this legal expert and says, "Alright, what do you think. Which one of those three men was a neighbor to the man who was robbed?" The expert responds, "the one who showed him mercy." And Jesus replies simply "go and do likewise." What I found interesting is that it still doesn't answer the question, does it? The question was "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' answer is, "Well, which one of these guys was a good neighbor?" Which one of these people showed this man mercy? Showed him love? The answer is that it was the Samaritan, the outsider. But the reply isn't well then, he's your neighbor. It's "go and be like him." I got to thinking about how this non answer is an answer. And the reason that this non answer works is because Jesus takes the question and flips it on its head. And it goes from being, "who is the neighbor I'm supposed to love?" to "How can I be a good neighbor to others?" And it's in that change of question that we discover the real answer. Because if we were to go by the normal teachings of the day, we would normally think of the priest and Levite as being the man's neighbor. They were part of the in crowd, the circle of people who belonged. And of course, the Samaritan is the outsider who would not be a neighbor. He would be an enemy. Maybe not one that should be treated with outright hostility, but one that shouldn't be approached. One that shouldn't be loved. But because the Samaritan showed mercy and cared for this person at the side of the road, somebody he had nothing to do with, he was the one being a good neighbor. We also look at the fact that the Samaritan would not have owed this person at the side of the road anything. Why should he care for him? It's not his responsibility. It's not one of his people. But Jesus has a way of showing a deeper truth in telling this parable.

"Who is my neighbor?" And the answer that I see in this non answer is, everyone. But especially those who are in need. If somebody needs you to be a good neighbor, then they're your neighbor. If somebody needs your help than they're your neighbor. Jesus takes this rather simple question and turns it into a statement about how we should live. Not simply looking after our own. Not simply looking after those who are already in our circle. Not keeping to the normal social system that says who's in and who's out, but to say if somebody is in need then somebody deserves your help. If somebody is in need of love, then you love them. Which raises another question. Who's in need of love? And the answer that I get to that question from Christ's words is everyone. You're not bound to only help the Israelites. You are not bound to only help the people near you. But if you are to love your neighbor as yourself, then you should love all. Now, we might take this for granted. We might say, "well of course that's always the teaching" and not notice how revolutionary it is. Because though the Bible talks about helping

the immigrant and helping the stranger, the Old Testament is also fraught with who to exclude, who to turn away from, who to keep out. We have all sorts of foreign people that aren't supposed to be included. The enemies of Israel that should never be part of your family. That we have those who should be excluded. To the point that in some sections of the Old Testament it even tears families apart, sending away foreign wives because people need to be true to Israel.

But here Jesus puts a Samaritan as the good person in the story. And there are many modern ways that we could try to retell this, but the problem is that it really depends on the person that's being addressed. We could fill in the Samaritan with all sorts of people. We could fill it in with somebody who doesn't share your religion. The one who is a good neighbor is the Muslim who comes by and rescues this man at the side of the road. Could be political party. It's the man that's not from your party that comes by and saves the man at the side of the road. It could be the man with the tattoos and the piercings that comes by at the side of the road. It could be the homeless woman, the gay couple, the drug addict, the alcoholic, and on and on. Endlessly we could fill that role with people that we may not think of as being the person to look up to in the story. All sorts of people that someone might say isn't their neighbor. But the lesson that Jesus gives us is that to love your neighbor means to show mercy and kindness, always. Not to look away from those in need, but to offer help. Who knows what was going through the head of the Levite or the priest? Maybe they thought it was a trap. Maybe that injured man is supposed to be at the side of the road, and when we go to help him, we'll be ambushed, and it would be better for us to go on our way than to offer help. Maybe they thought that they would dirty themselves and become unclean by helping this man at the side of the road because they didn't know who he was. But the contrast that we get is between fear and love. The Levite and the priest, for whatever reason, fear helping this man. They might not call it fear, but that's all it is because it's a fear of showing love. But the Samaritan comes and is concerned, interrupting his own journey to help. Inconveniencing himself and taking money out of his own pocket to help a stranger, because someone was in need.

So, the way that I see this parable, reflecting on it today, is that it's not just about asking ourselves, "who is my neighbor? Who are the people I should love?" But it goes to a deeper question of "how should I love?" Because the truth of the matter is that when we love unconditionally, when we love others the way that Christ loves us, then we love not expecting a return on that love, but we love because it's the right thing to do. We reflect the love that God has shown us in the way that we treat others. We reflect Christ's love in going to the cross on our behalf in showing love to others. Instead of saying, "I must judge you worthy of my love before I give it." But saying, "I love because Christ loves me. I love, because God has shown me love. I hope to help you because God has helped me. I want to show you mercy, because God has shown me mercy. Then I will love you even if you hate me because your hate doesn't dictate how I love." Because, the thing is, when we look back, the legal expert was asking the wrong question. He was not asking, "How do I love my neighbor?" He was asking, "Who can I

deny love to?” And that question itself is showing an unwillingness to love. So, for us the answer is quite simple, we go forth and we love because it is the right thing to do. We go forth and we love because Christ loves us. We go forth and we love because it is the way that others experience not only our love but Christ's love. That we show others goodness so they may know the goodness of our God. That others may know God's grace through our grace. And then our hearts are not made heavy by hate asking, “Who is my neighbor?” so that we can figure out who to exclude. But asking, “How can I be a good neighbor?” knowing that we must always love. That we let the love of Christ shine through in all that we are in all that we do, so with unburdened hearts, we may love God with all that we are. And we share in that love by loving others the way that Christ loves us. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

October 3rd – *Think Carefully* – Luke 16:1-13

This week, we take a look at a parable of a dishonest manager and are faced with some difficult questions about God and wealth.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Allen Goebel & Family	Jodie Bunch	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Family of Herbert "Tip" Carlen
Family of Andy Shull	Family of Brent Pitcher	Family of Allan Dunne	Family of Bill Hayden

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