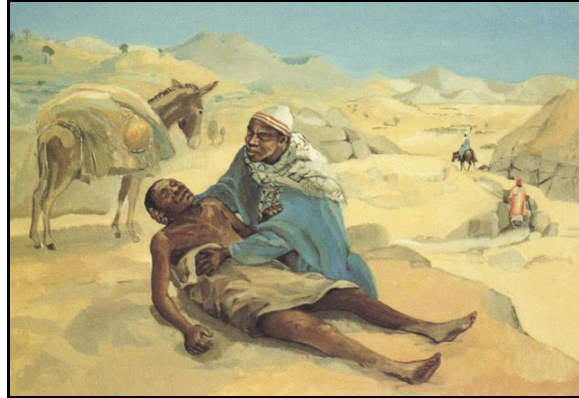


NEIGHBORS MATTER



Scripture:

Psalm 25:1-10

¹To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. ²O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. ³Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. ⁵Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

⁶Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. ⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

⁸Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. ¹⁰All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell

into the hands of the robbers?"³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



NEIGHBORS MATTER

Let us pray: Exuberant Spirit of God may your message of truth be revealed and a new understanding of your will for our lives be conveyed. In Christ's name we gratefully pray. Amen

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Today I'd like to share with you two different perspectives on how to apply this lesson to our daily lives. The two intersect at the word neighbor.

The day before Martin Luther King, Jr. died, he was in Memphis TN where he was supporting a strike by the city sanitation workers.

In his last sermon titled: *I've Been to the Mountaintop*, he explained the story of the Good Samaritan this way: "One day a man came to Jesus and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters of life. He wanted to trick Jesus and show him that he knew a little more than Jesus knew and throw him off base. Now that question (Who is my neighbor?) could have easily ended up in a philosophical and theological debate.

But Jesus immediately pulled that question from midair and placed it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jericho, and he talked about a certain man who fell among thieves.

You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side; they didn't stop to help him. Finally, a man of another race came by. He got down from his beast, decided not to be compassionate by proxy.

But he got down with him, administered first aid, and helped the man in need. Jesus ended up saying this was the good man, this was the great man because he had the capacity to project the "I"

into the "thou," and to be concerned about his brother.

WHY DIDN'T THE PRIEST AND THE LEVITE STOP?

Now, you know, we use our imagination a great deal to try to determine why the priest and the Levite didn't stop. At times we say they were busy going to a church meeting, an ecclesiastical gathering, and they had to get on down to Jerusalem so they wouldn't be late for their meeting.

At other times we would speculate that there was a religious law that one who was engaged in religious ceremonials was not to touch a human body twenty-four hours before the ceremony.

**But I'm going to tell you what my imagination tells me!
It's possible that those men were afraid.
You see, the Jericho Road is a dangerous road.**

I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road I said to my wife, "I can see why Jesus used this as the setting for his parable." It's a winding, meandering road. It's really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is twelve hundred feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho fifteen or twenty minutes later, you're about twenty-two feet below sea level.

That's a dangerous road. In the days of Jesus, it came to be known as the "Bloody Pass." And you know, it's possible that the priest and the

Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around.

Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking and he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy robbery.

And so, the first question that the priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?"

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

But then the Good Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?" That's the question before you tonight.

Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to my job?" Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?"

The question is not, "If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?" The question is, "If I do *not* stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" That's the question. Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge, to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation."

So, Dr. King said, "When the Good Samaritan came by, he reversed that question. In his mind he must have said: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

God calls us to lose our self-centered ego and think beyond our own needs to the needs of others. Are you the kind of person who will stop

whatever you are doing to help someone else? Jeanne and Fred were like that.

Mother Teresa said, **"Do things for people not because of who they are or what they do but because of who you are."**

Gloria Steinem has a quote that reflects the lesson in this parable. She said, "Whenever one person stands up and says, 'Wait a minute, this is wrong,' it is contagious and helps other people do the same." It also works the other way, when one person ignores a person in need others feel self-righteous about doing the same. They say to themselves, well that person didn't bother so neither will I bother.

THE LOWLY SAMARITAN WAS THE GOOD GUY

Reverend Amy Butler has another take on this parable worth noting. She starts out describing "a little bit of Jewish history: by the time Jesus and the lawyer were doing their little intellectual sparring, Jews and Samaritans had hated each other for over a thousand years. When King Solomon died the monarchy broke into two factions: the ten tribes of the North rebelled and founded a capital in the city of Samaria. The two southern tribes made their capital in Jerusalem. There was long-held ethnic hostility and political and religious rivalry between Jews and Samaritans. So, when Jesus said "Samaritan," the lawyer immediately knew where that man stood in the ranks of power. (Very low.)

Well, you know what happened. The Samaritan stopped and helped the wounded man, bandaged him and took him to safety, provided for him until he was fully healed. The Samaritan was the good guy.

WHO IS BEING A NEIGHBOR?

And the way we've always heard this story interpreted is this: The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Let me get exactly clear what I have to do, who I have to help. But that wasn't the question.

The lawyer had asked: “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus gave him a parable about *who is being a neighbor*.

This is exactly how Jesus turns this parable on its head, showing us a different expression of power. Jesus doesn’t answer the lawyer’s question at all. Instead, Jesus asks a different question: are you ready to BE a neighbor?

Jesus completely reframes the conversation. For the lawyer, it must have been exciting standing there that day having a scholarly conversation with a young, up and coming rabbi, the theoretical questions he posed were about religion and rules.

But Jesus’ story about powerful and holy people doing what they thought was right alongside a societal outcast who actually *did* what was right sends an upside-down message to the powerful lawyer in search of his next step up the social ladder.

TRUE POWER

Jesus makes it clear that true power comes from a faith that animates our lives and transforms our hearts; it’s not about who you are on the power grid of human life. It’s about the power of sacrificial love that knows that outward appearances of power mean very little; it’s inner transformation that results in radical actions of love, such as protecting the vulnerable and respecting our differences.

True power doesn’t come from your professional label, or your societal position. In this parable the pitiful societal outcast was the real powerhouse.

The lawyer asks, “Who is my neighbor?” But the better question is: “How do I BE a neighbor?”

Let’s imagine how this scene might play out in a big and powerful city like San Francisco. The scene is a wine tasting party. You notice Jesus, over near the bar, surrounded by people drawn to his charismatic manner and way of speaking. So, you sidle up to the bar, then kind of push your way through the crowd. You see a few friends and associates, pass out a couple business cards, until you get into his line of sight. Wow, he

really is compelling!! He seems to be an expert on good people and good wine!

THE QUESTION, AND JESUS ANSWER

Then he turns and starts talking to you! The conversation begins with the typical question, of course, “What do you do?” and it progresses from there. You can tell that this guy is really smart; he seems to have a unique perspective on the political and social issues of our day.

Wanting to be sure you make a good impression, just in case you need him as a contact in the future, you toss out a question like: “Hey Jesus, what kind of legislation do you think we need to pass to address the racial and social injustices in society today?”

You listen intently and seriously, while Jesus pauses for a minute, clears his throat and begins: “On the night of February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida, a young high school student wearing a black hoodie to ward off the falling rain, walked down the street from his father’s fiancé’s home to a nearby convenience store.... to buy some Skittles...”

A video was shown to the congregation.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhY6AlyS3NI>

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen



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