

Yes and...

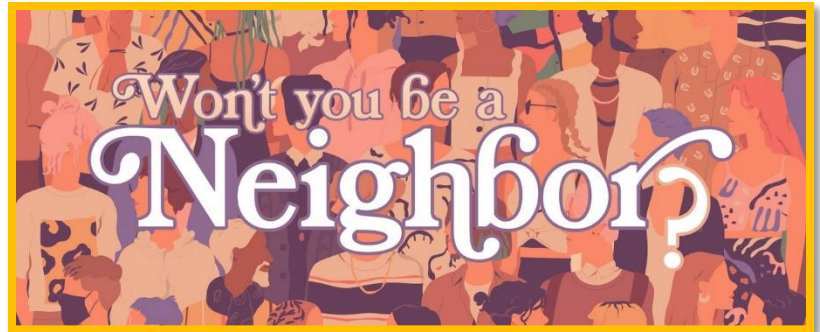
Message #1 in the series "Won't You Be a Neighbor?"

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Today, we're going to be looking in Luke's Gospel Chapter 10. So, if you have your Bible with you today, I invite you to start working your way. There, we will be starting at around verse 38. So, Luke 10 verse 38.

As we move into a new season here at St Paul's Church, we're moving into a new message series as well, and it's titled "Won't You Be a Neighbor?" And over the next several weeks, we're going to lean into a

sermon conversation on what it might mean to be someone who can make the difference in the life of another person. Do you really know who your neighbors are? I mean, think about it for a moment. Do you really know who they are? Do they know you and who you really are? As we emerge from a time of social and physical distancing where we put significant barriers between one another, the need for good neighbors, in this day and age, is never more relevant than right now. But just because you may know someone's name doesn't mean that you're actually a good neighbor to them or even that you actually know them, who they are, where they come from. What might happen if you actually took time to know these things? If you actually knew them and they knew you and the faith of the very foundation of who you are. How might it change you? How might it change your church? How many change your neighborhood or your city?



So, this series asks you to consider how you are a neighbor and what God might do through you to bring hope to another person's life. It asks us to pray that God gives us a passion for those God places into our sphere of influence. Won't you be a neighbor? So, if you've ever had a great neighbor, I think you can attest to the remarkable gift it is to live next to the people that you get along with. Likewise, if you've ever had a bad neighbor, someone who is very difficult or someone you might even say is impossible to live next door to, you, too, can attest to how important it is to have good neighbors. Am I right? It is easy for us to contextualize a message series about neighbors, to think about the places that we live, our neighborhoods. That is where we spend a lot of our time, after all. Might be a dorm building, an apartment complex, a condo, a standalone home, or a townhome wherever you might reside. No matter how big or small our community might be.

During this conversation today, I'd like us to zoom in and zoom out a little bit about what it means to be a neighbor, because I contend that you can be a neighbor, you can be neighborly wherever you go. You can allow the foundation of your faith to show through no matter where you might be. You can be neighborly in the supermarkets or in the McDonald's drive thru. You can be neighborly at work. You can be neighborly at the park or at the mall. You can be neighborly while playing with a team or running by yourself on the trail. You can even be neighborly at church. A neighborly skill that I like us to practice this morning is being a "yes and" neighbor. I'm going to invite you to practice this with me. It's going to take just a second to set up. So, hang with me here. Are you a "yes and" neighbor or are you a "yeah, but" neighbor? Are you a "yes and" neighbor or are you a "yeah, but" neighbor? You see the difference? All right.

So, here's how I'd like us to try this. We're going to try this on this morning. And I'm going to do a really, I don't know if it's adventurous thing or not. We're going to see how this goes. I'm going to invite you here in a moment to turn to someone that you're seated next to. It could be somebody that you came to church with, but to really give this a try, I'm going to invite you to turn around and try to find someone that you did not come to church with today. And I'd like, as you now, are in a new partnership or in a small group of three, I'd like someone in that pairing to start by saying something that they love about knowing Jesus Christ. What's something that you just love about being in a relationship with Jesus? As the other person is listening, you've got to listen closely. What I would love for you to do as a "yes and" neighbor, after the first person is done talking, try this script, say "yes and..." follow up with something that you also believe is great about knowing Jesus Christ. Okay, so in your new partnership, I want you to go back and forth a couple of times to see what happens. The first thing that you need to say in reply is "yes and..." Sound good? Okay.

So, from my vantage point, standing all the way up here, as I'm hearing the conversations unfold, I can hear a lot of chatter, but every once in a while, I think because my ear was tuned to it, I could hear "yes ands" like popcorn popping all over the room. It was really, really cool to see. Now, this is a little exercise that I like to share with groups that I talk to across the college campus. I work at Elizabethtown College, and oftentimes I'm leading conversations with groups of people that have not yet met one another. And this is a great way that they can introduce themselves or to learn more about the people that they're going to be working with. In that little exercise I usually start by contrasting it with "yeah, but" and you can imagine how that conversation would have gone if you were given that exercise to do as well. It would not probably have been as productive or interesting or uplifting, but a "yes and" relationship, a "yes and" dialog can create some really neat opportunities to learn more about the people that you're sitting next to, the people that you walk by every single day, and that sometimes maybe you only pass a couple of words between one another.

One of the great obstacles we often encounter in developing neighborly relationships and connections, no matter the context of where we are, is communicating care and affirmation. These are things that are often difficult to establish when we're talking to one another. But by saying "yes and" we are signaling first that we're listening, and we actually are affirming what the other person is saying. You see, in doing so, we're communicating something very important. We're communicating a presence that is often difficult to establish quickly. Now, a skeptic might say, "come on, Pastor Matt, we just spent 2 minutes talking about maybe nothing at all." To which I would say, "yes and sometimes the context of a meeting is more important than the content." Sometimes being in a conversation where another person feels heard and affirmed is more important than anything you could ever say, but it depends on the context.

Related to this and something that I want us to focus on today as we look at Luke 10 is another key feature about being neighborly, and that is hospitality. About a month ago I had the privilege, and I can't believe, by the way, that I have this illustration to share with you and it's happened so recently in my life given the title of our sermon series and the connection that we can make to it here. About a month ago, I had the privilege of attending the Western Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of English Annual Conference. This was the first face-to-face professional conference that I, as a college professor or as an academic, had an opportunity to attend in over two years. The conference was held, coincidentally, at the Fred Rogers Center at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. You know, Fred Rogers, Mister Rogers neighborhood, you're seeing the connection with our title here today.



Here's just a few pictures that I was able to capture from the Fred Rogers Center. But you can see, like there are some of the puppets from the Mister Rogers Neighborhood show his sneakers that he would have used on the set of Mister Rogers Neighborhood and some of the sweaters that would have been used as well. What's interesting about these artifacts and these displays that are on display at the center is they're very nostalgic. I grew up as a child watching this show every single day and sometimes twice a day and I couldn't help but just relive some of those really amazing memories of turning on public television at my grandma Jessie's house, it was one of four channels that we got in rural Kansas. And being whisked away to a place that was altogether impossible to imagine without

the imagination of Mr. Rogers. But what's interesting about these photographs, and while they certainly bring up some kind of nostalgia, they really don't capture the most important aspect of this center that Fred Rogers built towards the end of his life on the campus of Saint Vincent College. It's a center that focuses on children's media and programming and education. But when you walk into this building, they have these large open doors that open very easily, and you're immediately put at ease when you walk into the Fred Rogers Center. It's unlike any other academic building I've ever been in. It's warm and inviting. When you walk in, there's this grand stairwell. It's wide and welcoming. You walk up to the second floor where the ballroom is located, where all the convention rooms are and it's just hard to put into words. But the experience is quite memorable. Everything from the design of the doors, how they open and how the staff their kind of takes care of just every single thing you could ever think of and need. It was it was truly the picture of hospitality.

Now, I was scheduled that day to. To give a 30-minute keynote address. And I couldn't help but. But. But, you know, I'm a worrier by nature. And I would have pictured myself being kind of a worried mess that day, trying to prepare to talk for 30 minutes in front of a bunch of people that I'd never met. But as I think back on it, I don't remember worrying about a single detail, which is odd. It was as if the Fred Rogers Center and the staff that runs it had thought of everything. It wasn't too much. It wasn't too little. It was just right. Which again, it seems unfitting or out of place, because when I think about it, when you try to bring that many people into one place trying to be hospitable, that often involves a lot of details. Well, our text for today is a story that takes place at the home of Mary and Martha. And this gives us several clues about what



neighborly hospitality is, because it involves a really important message from Jesus as well. And as the New Testament will often do, the story also serves as an important illustration for us as we consider our own hearts and our own relationship with Jesus Christ.

So, I'm going to invite you to dive in with me here. We're going to take this verse by verse and kind of unpack this a little bit to see what God can reveal to us today through His scripture and through His word. So here, Luke 10, we're going to start at verse 38, it says this,

"As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him." [Luke 10:38 NIV].

All right, so notice this first action that we see from Martha, she opens her home to Jesus and his disciples. Martha is taking the first step and opening her home, and this serves as an important reminder to us to be a neighbor, to begin brokering new relationships and to pour into the lives of others. It begins with each of us opening our hearts. Opening our hearts to Jesus, opening our hearts to His possibilities in our lives. In doing so, we take on His likeness. We take on His grace and His love and His peace. And we can share these things with other people. Well, that moves us into being the very ambassadors for Christ in this world. By reaching out to help those who Jesus loves. But it begins with an opening of doors. Sometimes physically like the doors to our homes or our offices or places that we have some influence over. Or it can begin figuratively by opening the doors of our hearts. Continuing on to verse 39,

"She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said." [Luke 10:39 NIV].

So this story moves pretty quickly. There's, you know, Jesus and his disciples are coming. Martha opens her doors. Everyone comes in. Jesus starts talking. And here's Mary, Martha's sister, sitting at the feet of Jesus while He's talking to His disciples and possibly other people who've gathered in Martha's home. We don't know from the text about how many people there are in Martha's home now, but it's probably more than Martha and Mary would have entertained on a regular basis. And while Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to everything He has to say, the text is quick to point out an important point of contrast between the two sisters. Check this out. Verse 40 starts with the greatest contrasting word ever, mentioned it earlier,

"But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." [Luke 10: 40 NIV].

We have two sisters, two worldviews, two approaches here while Mary is listening and being present with Jesus, Martha is distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She was consumed by all the doing that needed to get done, and we can imagine just how much needed to be done. There was probably a great deal of cleaning and cooking that needed to be done. All the rearranging and tidying that had to be done, all on the fly, while putting all kinds of food on the table. And I get it. Can I tell you a secret? I'm definitely a Martha. Any other Martha's in the room today? Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Brave hands. By the way, if you're sitting next to Martha, don't tell them. They know. They know.

I would be so consumed in this moment. I would be so consumed in this moment to make sure that no one was wanting of anything. That everything was prepared just so I might even go an extra mile to make sure that there's backups of things that people might need. I'm trying to anticipate every

possible need, like I am a Martha in this story. Just like Martha in this moment, I can imagine very easily that I would be completely consumed with the doing. With so much doing, that I too would be distracted. Two sisters, two approaches, two different points of view. What does hospitality mean to you? Are you focused on the doing? Or are you focused on the being? I don't believe that there's inherently anything wrong with either sister's mindset in this story. When we open our hearts to Jesus, when we say yes to Him and Him saying yes to us, we are equipped through the Holy Spirit with certain gifts and talents. And these gifts and talents, praise God, are different for every single person. And we are called as his ambassadors, to use these gifts to further God's kingdom. To be good neighbors. We open our lives to those who Jesus loves most.

But there is one word that should give us pause here in verse 40. Just one word. I mentioned it earlier, and I want to I want to emphasize it here. And that word is distracted. Distracted. To her credit, Martha is trying to do everything. And in trying to do everything, she reaches a breaking point. You can imagine how frantic and hurried she must have been. All these people are in her house. She's trying to get everything done. And there's her sister. Doing nothing. She reaches a breaking point. She exacerbadated. And she says out loud, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me." In the NIV translation, they go to the effort of putting an exclamation point in there, I want to point out. She's exacerbadated. She's reached her breaking point. She's distracted by all this doing that has to be done. In that moment. As verse 41 and 42 illustrate. Jesus, the very name, and presence of peace intervenes with a special word of teaching. He says,

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about how many things, but few things are needed - or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." [Luke 10:41-42 NIV].

Two sisters. Two worldviews. One choosing a different way. In this moment. One is very worried about many things and in this life, I think we can sometimes be distracted from the calling that God has made in our lives by filling up our lives with many things. Or in other cases, we may buy into the false belief that God could never use us to help other people because we've let too many things pile up that are unaddressed, that are unsaid. We can let these many things get in the way all the time. If you're like me, you might have even heard at one time or another, God speak to you about something that new and foreign that He was going to send you to do, but you can think of so many reasons, so many things as to why that will never work out or why that won't happen, or why you aren't prepared or why you aren't good enough. So many things. You may think that you need to first do many things before you can finally sit at the foot of God to hear what He has to say to you. We can be distracted friends, by many, many things.

If we are the type of people who worry about the doing, we can fill our lives and calendars up so quickly and we can convince ourselves very easily that we are doing good things. And so all of these many, many things are more necessary than anything else or anyone else. What Martha's story shares with us, the cautionary tale here, is that I think we can think many things are needed, but Jesus' is saying, only a few things are necessary, and in fact, it may only be one thing that is necessary at all. Mary, the other sister, was focused on being present. This was the one thing she needed to focus on. As such, Jesus affirmed that this will not be taken away from Mary. As an ambassador of Christ, we are called to reach out to those around us, to show hospitality in the name of our heavenly host. That might mean opening our home, yes, but it doesn't have to. It can be opening a space for a conversation that needs to happen. Something that has not been said that needs to be said. Offering a listening ear or a shoulder to lean on. It could be providing a lift to medical appointments. Or sharing

your expertise. It can be a conversation over coffee. Or it can be delivered in a home cooked meal. Hospitality. It's in the doing. And it's in the being.

What does hospitality look like to you? What does it mean to move forward into the wide, wild world with your faith? Are you about doing? If so, are you doing too many things? Are you about the being? If so, are you being present in the right moment? Who are you listening to? And what are they saying? In being a neighbor no matter where we go, do not be overwhelmed or distracted by many things because we serve a "yes and" God. He sees you. He hears you. He knows you. And he goes with you. No matter which neighborhood you visit.

Would you join me in prayer?

Gracious God, we thank You for this day. We thank You that You are with us in the doing Lord. You are with us in the being. As we go forth forward, remind us of Mary. Remind us of Martha. As we look to seek and find those who need to hear the very name of Jesus. To feel the presence of Christ in their lives. As You have so boldly equipped us, Lord. Let us be ready in those moments where we can be your ambassadors. Be Your bachelors in the new in the doing and be Your ambassadors. Ambassadors in the being. These seems to bring Your gracious name. Amen.