

Good Samaritan

Message #2 in the series "Won't You Be a Neighbor?"

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Well, good morning. Grace and peace to you in the name of God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. It's so good to be with you today. I want to especially thank Pastor Matt for pinch hitting at a moment's notice last week as I got sick with whatever bug was going on. It's not COVID. I am not contagious anymore. But it was great of Matt to step in at the last minute and I got a chance to watch online. And Matt, you did a great job. What a profound message. And I'd like to continue that message series, "Won't You Be a Neighbor" today. And as I do so, we want to invite you to open your Bible to the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 10 and as you're doing that, I want to invite you into this moment of prayer as we prepare our hearts for what the Lord has in mind to teach us today. Let's pray together.

Gracious Lord, open Your word to us and open us up to Your word. Teach us what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this Father we pray in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, Amen.

So, I have a question. Pastor Matt asked this last week; I'm going to ask it again as we build a bridge from last week to this week. Do you know your neighbor? Maybe we have more than one. Maybe you're in a rural community. Maybe you're lucky to have one. Maybe you have way too many from your perspective. Maybe your neighbors know more about you than you think they do. Maybe you know about your neighbors more than they think you do. We tend to see a lot, don't we, when we open our eyes going through our neighborhoods and sometimes when we drive through other neighborhoods, we learn a lot about who lives in those communities. What is a neighbor? More specifically, who is a neighbor? Are you a neighbor? Am I? Jesus begs that question when He has an interaction with an interesting character. We read about it in Luke, Chapter 10. I want to start reading that with you and interrupted every once in a while with some perhaps reflections, perhaps invitations. So, I direct your attention to Luke Chapter 10, starting at verse 25. This is what we read,

"Just then a lawyer..." I have to pause there. I mean, doesn't that say a lot right there?

"Just then, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' [Luke 10:25-26 NSRV].

I love that exchange with Jesus and this lawyer. So in classic Jesus principle, when a lawyer approaches you with a question, you give a lawyer response. And so that's what Jesus does, what's written in the law. And so, verse 27,

"He 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.'" [Luke 10:27 NSRV].

So very interesting.

"And He said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this and you will live.'" [Luke 10: 28 NSRV].

So, it's an interesting exchange. So, a lawyer asks the question. Jesus responded with a law answer and in fact, says. "Hey. Go do this. Go do it and you're going to find the life that you were searching for." Who is being tested here? Really? So, verse 28,

"And He said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this and you will live.' But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" [Luke 10:28-29 NSRV].

Notice the phrase before our phrase, before the guy asks, "Who is my neighbor?" Notice we read, "and wanting to justify himself," it's a really important phrase because it sets the tone of what Jesus is about to do in response. Keep that in mind. Before we launch into Jesus's response, I got some time over the past couple of weeks to reflect on that question that the lawyer had asked. Who is my neighbor? Who is my neighbor? I really have kind of narrowed down. I'm not a big reductionistic kind of person, but if I can make complex things simpler, all the better, certainly as I teach it, but more importantly for my own growth and understanding. The simpler, the better. So, I've kind of narrowed down that concept of neighbor to two types of neighbors. Two types. There's probably a lot of characteristic features that we could add to this, but two types of neighbors.

First, there's the intentional neighbors, and then what I'm calling the accidental neighbors. The intentional neighbors and the accidental neighbors. So I got a little playful. I don't know if it was being sick and the medicines that I was on or not. Probably after you hear this message, you're going to say, 'I think you need to be back on those medicines.' But I, I crafted hopefully some playful, creative snapshots of what neighbors could look like, using some standard definitions of our neighborhoods and metaphoric understandings of those who live within those neighborhoods. So, there's five of them.

First, there's Cul-de-Sac Casey and Kathy and these are the individuals where in the cul de sac metaphor, your neighbor is your circle. You share within your circle, right? You know, what goes around comes around. You loan your snowblower, they loan their weed whacker, and you manage to work together within that community. Trust is built over time and a positive, you know, real strong pro is that you're part of a community. There's an activity of one influence all within that cul de sac. And then the negative, of course, is that everything is seen by everyone, literally. In a cul de sac, you can look out your window and see through the window of your neighbors. You can go out your door and see what's happening in the neighborhood. The circle, all of the homes, everything. You know, when you go out to sunbathe, everybody sees it. Or the good or the bad. That's Cul de Sac Casey and Kathy.

Well, then there's Main Street, Mike and Mabel. Main Street. Mike and Mabel reflect small town America. Everyone knows everyone. The positive about that is you are you are part of a strong, defining sense of values. Strong sense of community. The challenge of that is that enmeshment can occur sometimes. It's difficult to break into that socially because everybody knows everybody. Strangers, oh, you got to earn your way in. Anybody here live in Main Street, America?

Then there's Suburban Sam and Sarah. Suburban Sam and Sarah reflect a community where maybe you know the names of at least some of your neighbors, but everyone pretty much stays to themselves. The positive is friendships with neighbors can be built over time, but you must be intentional about it. You must seek one another out. And the negative is you're constantly clarifying boundaries. In fact, the clarifying of boundaries is essential. Why? Unless you have a fence, you don't

really know where your property line ends and theirs begins. Who mows what? What's the line? That's your responsibility. And what's mine?

Then there's Rural Rachel and Richard where neighbors are few and far between. The positive here is that you have gracious and generous people. They're gracious and generous, mostly with those whom they know. Especially family. Family is really your neighborhood. That's what it means to be a neighbor. The negative is suspicion is normal, and we're suspicious of outsiders. We have an insular culture. Of course, I'm generalizing, right? Because if you live in a rural community, not talking about you necessarily. Or even me. It's everybody else.

And then this one was hard for me. Then there's Urban Ursula and Ervin. I challenge you to find a really good male name that begins with U. I tried Ulysses. Ulysses, but it didn't flow very nicely. The Urban Ursuline Ervin are accustomed to diversity, to anonymity. Things are impersonal. Suspicion is normal. Physically crowded, but socially distant. That's the mantra. Always in a hurry. Relationships are often transactional, and you may be grouped in the hood.

All of those are examples of the defaults of neighborhoods in metaphor, language. What does it mean for us to be intentional neighbors? The intentional neighbors, in metaphor language illustrates how we approach those who are different than us. So, if from an intentional neighbor perspective, which is your default? Given a situation, what's your go to? What's the natural default in how you interact with those who are in need? Cul de sac Casey and Kathy, Main Street, Mike and Mabel, Suburban Sam and Sarah, Rural Rachel and Richard, Urban Ursula and Ervin? Do you have a default? You may want to say like I did initially. Oh, no, I go into many different categories. But there is a default in us. So, what happens when we begin to engage somebody in crisis? What is revealed. Hold on to that for just a brief moment. There is a second type. We had the intentional neighbor. The second type is the accidental neighbor. The accidental neighbor. Being a neighbor depends on our ability and willingness to see ourselves as connected to a larger community. That's why being in a default is important. It's so important for us to recognize that we have a tendency to go where we're used to going. But being a genuine neighbor is beginning to capture the sense that we're part of something larger. Whether larger is like in rural senses, few and far between or in urban senses, we're literally too close for comfort. What's the default? Being a neighbor also depends on our ability not to live in isolation. To choose not to live isolated from one another. And to choose that our actions really do impact other people within our relational connections. Being a neighbor needs to keep that in mind. And so, when we begin to reflect on intentional moving to accidental neighbor, which is the second type, we need to give some definition for what it means to be a neighbor by accident.

So, what I mean by accidental neighbor is those who are called on to respond with care and compassion to a total stranger often at a moment's notice. Have you ever needed to do that? Step in and help somebody that you didn't know? You were being an accidental neighbor. Let's define it just a little bit further now, using the words of the parable that Jesus taught. We all have heard this parable, I'm sure, in many different facets, whether you've grown up in the church or not, you've seen this on TV, you've seen it play out, you've heard people reference this, whether they were Christians or not. They have known in public domain this teaching of Jesus, this parable of the Good Samaritan. So Jesus is responding to the lawyer. Remember that? And he tells this story. Starts in verse 30,

"Jesus 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.' [Luke 10:30 NSRV].

Now Jesus is telling this parable to a bunch of Jewish individuals who knew exactly the reference point. That roadway from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious in those days. It was a scary road. You never wanted to be traveling on that road by yourself. Often there would be robbers who would jump you. So, the audience was connecting to the story. Jesus was very clear. He's telling this story with a purpose. Verse 31,

"Now by chance a priest was going down the road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side." [Luke 10:31-32 NSRV].

So, we have a priest and a Levite. A priest and a Levite would be well known in the Jewish circles that were the audience members of Jesus's story. So, the question, why did the neighbor cross the street? Why did the neighbor cross the street? Not going to answer it just yet. We certainly are getting a picture of why the priest and the Levite cross the street. Initially when I was writing this message, I was going to bring out my Jersey smart alecky kind of response and say, "why did these neighbors cross the street? It's to join with the other chickens." But as I reflected on that. I asked myself, "what would I have done?" Which is what led me back to, perhaps the priest and the Levite were simply responding out of their default. Whichever their normal way of seeing themselves as a neighbor would have been. That's the basis of their response. And would that not have been true of me? Hmm. So, Jesus continues with the parable. So, you have a priest, and you have a Levite, they cross the street. They avoid. They have seen. And they avoid. Verse 33,

"But a Samaritan ..." Now, the Jewish audience to which Jesus is sharing this has been with him all the way up to this moment. As soon as Jesus says, "but a Samaritan." They're, in my mind, I'm hearing a guffaw, a gasp. Why? Because Jesus is making a reference to someone who notoriously would not have been classified as a neighbor to the Jewish people. The Samaritans and the Jews, they were enemies. At best, they avoided each other. But there was historical animosity between those two camps. Jesus is making a very specific point. He's crossing a line, crossing a boundary. And now He has initiated a degree of tension in that arena.

"But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He 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." [Luke 10:33-34 NSRV].

So much is embedded in in these words of Jesus's story. The Samaritan crossed the road toward the individual who was beaten, started caring for him, started lavishing compassion out of his own expense of oil and wine, put him on his own animal and that meant that he himself had to walk. And they walked to the town to the inn. And he took care of him. Literally he went the extra mile. Verse 35,

"The 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.'" [Luke 10:35 NSRV].

That language we don't know too well in our culture. But a denarius, the denarii is plural. A denarius was the equivalent back then of probably a day's wage. And so literally he took two days' worth of salary and paid in advance for what was going to be needed. Wow. So, the parable ends and now Jesus is back in real time with the lawyer. And He says in verse 36,

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" He said, 'The one who showed him mercy. Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'" [Luke 10:36-37 NSRV].

Interestingly, it's the exact same answer that he gives now with greater clarity. Jesus said it earlier, 'Hey, you know what the law says? Go do that.' And the guy, the lawyer, putting legalese to the test says, 'well, who's my neighbor?' Have we not heard politicians do that? What do you mean when you say neighbor? And so Jesus tells a story and it illustrates it to the nth degree. And now we are faced with the same conclusion. Go do the same thing. Go do what even the Samaritan has done. It's an interesting dilemma that He created for that audience there. And what do we do with that? In simple terms, we have an answer for our riddle. Why does a neighbor across the street? Well one who is in Christ, one who is a follower of Jesus, we have an answer. It's because we're compelled by the love of Christ. That's why we cross the street. It's because we're compelled by the love of Christ.

The Apostle Paul was trying to get that point across when he wrote to the Corinthian church and II Corinthians Chapter 5, For Christ's Love Compels US because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died, and He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves. But for Him who died for them and was raised again. We are compelled by the love of Christ to be a neighbor. So much of our society over the years, we've waited for other people to be worthy of our love and support. We've waited for other people often to initiate. Well, depending on what our defaults are, we could be waiting a long time. Or maybe we're not wanting other people to have that much connection with us. Maybe we are very friendly to those that we want to be friendly with.

Many of you know that I have been asked many times to be a consultant in church conflict situations. And often when I go into churches and we start exploring some things, you know, they start, and this is all across the board. We all have done this. We start defining ourselves as being a very friendly church. They say it often, "we're a very friendly church." There's always somebody in the crowd that kind of chuckles. And I go, "What was that chuckle for?" And either she or he will say, "Yeah, we're a very friendly church, to those who are known to us." We have a perspective, and this is not about judgment. It's about saying we have to understand what our default is in order for us to be a neighbor. We are called we are compelled by the love of Jesus to take the initiative. We are challenged to be a neighbor. Which means that we have to be the ones who step out, who take that first step, who initiate because the love of Jesus compels us to.

So, what's your default? What's mine. And are we willing to take a risk to step out of that metaphoric default in order for us to be a neighbor? Both intentional and accidental. Because how we are in the intentional will influence and reflect itself when we're called upon in the moment to be an accidental neighbor. Would we be willing? Jesus says to all of us, "go and do the same thing as the Samaritan did." What does that look like?

You know, as I was processing how to how to begin to apply all of this, I kept going back to the prayer that I taught you all last year and that many of us have been praying all last year. You remember that prayer, right? Lord, what do you need me to see? What do you need me to hear? What do you need me to know? And what do you need me to do? I am your servant. In Jesus name. Amen. You remember that prayer? I want to challenge you. I want to challenge me to switch that up just a little bit. From this point on through this year. It's taking it up a notch and if you're willing to join me on this journey then my challenge would be that we would start praying this: Lord, who do you need me to see? Who do you need me to hear? Who do you need me to know? And what do you need me to do?

I am your servant in Jesus' name. As we close this message and perhaps as the Holy Spirit has nudged you, I want to invite you to join with me in praying this prayer.

Let's join together.

Lord, who do you need me to see? Who do you need me to hear? Who do you need me to know? And what do you need me to do? I am your servant in Jesus' name. Amen. So why did the neighbor across the street? Why will you? Amen.