

Moving Down the Line
Message #3 in the series "Won't You Be a Neighbor?"

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Happy Mother's Day to all of those of you who have been mothers or mother figures for individuals like me and for all of us, we would not be here without mothers. It is good to share with you the good news of Jesus Christ. It's my honor and delight to share with you the word of God as we prepare for that word. Would you join your hearts with me as we go before the Lord?

Gracious Lord, open us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, 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.

Well, we are smack dab in the middle of a message series that we're calling, "Won't You Be a Neighbor?" I really played with the idea of bringing a sweater, a cardigan sweater and putting that sweater on just at the start of this series, as well as the start of each of these messages, but, you know, cardigan sweaters, I absolutely love them. But because of my stature, they make me look even smaller. So sorry, we're not going to dabble there. But over the past several weeks, what we have been doing is we've been learning about neighbors and more specifically about us as a neighbor. What has God called us and equipped us to be when He calls us to be a neighbor? And last week I introduced to us a concept of two types of neighbors. First, as you may remember, was the intentional neighbor. And I actually kind of humorously set aside five different types of neighborhoods and kind of profiled what a neighbor looks like in those intentional neighborhoods. And I don't know if you had a chance to kind of think about that during the week and identify where you live and what kind of neighbor you have in you as a default, because that default kicks into gear when we have the second type of neighbor experience. And that's the accidental neighbor. The accidental neighbor is when we are called upon to be a neighbor, sometimes to total strangers in the spur of a moment. And usually we kick into gear in that neighbor mindset based on our default, what we're used to doing, what we're used to being in the sense of how we grew up or what we are used to living on a day to day basis. But sometimes God stretches us outside of our comfort zones in order for us to be a vehicle through whom God himself works to love somebody by surprise. That's the accidental neighbor.

I want to take this conversation a little bit deeper today and focus in on some demographics. I know we all love statistics, don't we? Some of us actually do, because our statistics and our demographic studies actually can teach us something very important about our neighborhoods. So recently talking about maybe about six, eight weeks or so ago, I did a demographic study and the study revolved around a ten-mile radius of this church. So, if you kind of put a thumb in the heart of this congregation and did a radius of ten miles and circled it around. And so, the study, the statistics that I'm about to share and I'm not giving you all of them, just a few salient ones, these reflect our neighbors. These are the people that perhaps we live near. Maybe it's even us. So, there are some interesting statistics that I want to share with you about our neighbors. Who's our neighbor? In 2021, when this statistic was really put together, the population in that ten-mile radius was about 170,839. How they got it to the specific person, I don't know, nor do I want to ask, but projected just over the next several years, by 2026, that population is going to increase by 5,437. That means between now and 2026, there's going to be an increase of about 5,000 people in that ten-mile radius of this church. Also, we learned that in 2021, the average age was 41 in that ten-mile radius. By 2026, they're projecting that to be 42. This is one of those areas that I have to confess, much to my chagrin, that I am above average. The beautiful thing about this is even though the average age is creeping up, it's creeping up rather slowly. And for

everybody's best interest here it is an average, which means that there are people on the upper end and people on the lower end that are combining to make this the average age. The other thing that we learned from this statistical study is that the population in that ten-mile radius is projected to grow in numbers in very specific ways by 2026.

In specific terms there are three categories that I want to highlight. The largest growth over the next several years is going to occur first in the population aged 65 and older. I know that that doesn't reflect a lot of people in this room today, but there's a large number of individuals who are moving into the retirement complexes in this ten-mile radius, and rightly so. And this is rapidly becoming one of the fastest and best-known places to retire. This is an opportunity for you to get your name in now because maybe by 2026 you would have an opening. Ages 65 and older, rapidly growing. There's another statistic that's really important for us. You're ready? The next largest, fastest growing statistic within this ten-mile radius, is occurring between the ages of zero and four. There's a huge next step wave of births that are going to be occurring within this ten-mile radius. Growth in the children and growth in single and young families age 25 through 34. This is really very important for us as a church and as a community. When we look at our neighborhood, what does it reflect and do we as a church reflect the population of our neighborhoods?

What this is saying in specifics, there's a quite a number of details that we as church leaders are going to be looking at even more closely. But for our purposes, I want to point out two very important reflections. Number one, by 2026, there is a projected growth in the number of young children. Are we hearing this? This is one of the main reasons why we are moving our Director of Children's Ministry position from part time to full time. We're anticipating that there's a larger number of children coming into the area, which means that there's a larger opportunity for us to minister to those families. Also, by 2026, this actually surprised me, the single parent households within that ten-mile radius is actually increasing to about 26% of the households with children. So, of all of the households with children, one out of every four of those households is going to be based in a single parent format. This is a change within our society and culture. Interesting.

A little bit more. This one is a graphic. It's a graphic depiction of our current population. The tiniest one, the very top at 12:00. That tiny little sliver that you can barely see. And don't take any of this personally. That is known as the G I group. The G.I. Group were those born from 1901 to 1924, and they make up today 1.1% of our population within that ten-mile radius. The next one, just slightly to the left, is 6.0%, that's in the kind of bluish color. 6.0% reflects the silent generation, those born 1925 to 1945. Interestingly enough, those two populations; the GI at 1.1% right now is projected to be 0.4% ten years from now. That makes sense, right? Because we can only last so long. We're all going to pass away at some point. For those who are in the silent generation 1925 to 1945 who were born in that span, right now, you are 6% of the population within this ten-mile radius is projected to move towards 2% of population for the same reason. The Baby Boom, which kind of had the microphone of life for a long stretch, right? These were individuals who were born 1946 to roughly 1960. Right now, they reflect an interesting 17.6% of the population within that ten-mile radius. They are projected to go down to 14.3%. Much for the same reason. We're all getting older. Gen-Xers, those who were born 1961 to 1981, they are right now at the 27.7% of the population. That's almost a third of the population are in the Gen-X category. They are going to shrink slightly to 27.2% by 2030. And then the millennials, 1982 to 2004, those who are born within that timeframe right now are reflecting 29.2%. They are kind of scaled down to 29%. So, the millennials are really taking a brunt of the entire population. Interestingly, those children born 2005 to 2025, those who aren't yet born, this is what's called the Gen Z or the homeland. The Gen Z population today reflects 18.4%. By 2030, they will be

27.1%. So, there's a huge shift. If you can just look at it from roughly 12 noon in a clock formation on your graphic there from 12 noon to roughly 9:00 pm, going in that clockwise format, we have three fourths of the population have been born from 1961 on.

So, the questions that we have before us is, do we know our neighbor? Do we know our neighbor? And do we as a church reflect our neighborhood? Hold on to that for just a brief moment. I want to take us one step further into the Gospel of Luke Chapter 10, and invite you to follow along in your Bible or in your Bible app. We're going to listen as Jesus again teaches us a very important life lesson. It's a very important life lesson, especially for those of us who are in the Church of Jesus Christ today within our neighborhoods and ready. This is Luke 10, starting at verse one,

"After this, the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. "[Luke 10:1 NRSV].

Let me pause there very briefly. Notice I've highlighted a few words here. First, I highlighted the word appointed. The Lord appointed. 70 some translations say 72. It's probably 70, but 72. Okay. What's two more? So, there's 70-ish people that had been following Jesus, that he is now sending. The word sent here is an important word. In Greek, the original language of the New Testament, it is the word "apostle." Apostle. So, Jesus is sending out apostles. Apostle is just one who is sent. When Jesus is sending these 70 or 72 people out, He's sending them with a purpose. Notice also the word sent is missional. It's really important for us. Jesus has a mission. There's an intentionality to what He's doing here. And He's sending them ahead of Himself. In pairs to every town and place. Get this. Where He Himself intended to go. So, he's sending them to prepare the way. Hold on to that thought for just a moment. Verse two,

"He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful...'" [Luke 10:2 NRSV].

Again, I want to pause here. How many of you, just by a show of hands are farmers? Anybody here? There was one hand. How many of you are gardeners? Quite a few. Right. How many of you grow trees? Fruit trees in particular? There's one or two. Okay. When you hear the phrase, the harvest is plentiful, doesn't that just kind of drum up in your mind an image, a visual image of abundance? It does me. When Kristine and I moved into our home for the very first time, we were overwhelmed. We had three apple trees in the backyard, and we had two peach trees. I thought we were just in heaven. I love apples and I love peaches. Right. The peach trees were not quite ready to be productive, but we were anticipating them. The apple trees, we moved in in September. So, the apples were beginning to come. You know, for a first timer, I was just so excited. I was excited to be a homeowner, number one. But I remember going into the backyard and seeing all of these apples and going, we have met the mother lode. About four weeks in when all of those apples started falling on to the ground and I had to roll them and pick them all up. And they were coming faster than I had the ability to eat or make applesauce or do anything with, I began to ask myself a very important question, "what was I thinking?" Right. There's an abundance here. The harvest was plentiful for us. What Jesus is doing is he's making a very strong point. The harvest of people ready and ripe, to use the metaphor, for the good news of the kingdom, is abundant. It's abundant. But then He says,

"But the laborers are few." [Luke 10:2 NRSV].

The laborers are few. A couple of days ago, I went to this vegetable and fruit stand that we go to, Kristine and I kind of bonded with the owner, and we drive quite a distance to get to the stand just to

support this family. And so we arrived there and they had some strawberries, which I just absolutely love. And normally they are their strawberries, but the crop has not come in yet. But they are getting strawberries from Carolina, the owner said. And I was talking with her, and I said, "when are your strawberries coming in?" And she said, "Not for several weeks. Because of the cold, everything has been pushed off." And she said, "I'm kind of glad that's pushed off because really we don't have enough workers to collect them all."

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." [Luke 10:2 NRSV].

I have highlighted a few of these words, very important words. Ask the Lord of the harvest. The word *ask* in the original language certainly is ask. It could be translated also as pray. It can also be translated as beg. The Lord of the harvest noticed it is the Lord of the harvest. The harvest is not ours. The harvest is not even our work. This is something that God has done. The harvest is produced by the abundant God that we serve. The other word that's important here is the word send out in Greek. It's *caballo*. And it's the same word that ironically is used at various different times in the New Testament to describe what Jesus does in the casting out of demons. He casts them out. And so, in this context, what Jesus is saying is, "hey, the laborers are too few to handle the abundant harvest that is yet to come. Ask the Lord of the Harvest to cast out, literally to dump out laborers in abundance to accommodate the harvest." It's his harvest. It's abundant because we serve an abundant God. There's a mission that is at stake that is really critical for us as the church. To grab a hold of the intentionality of this harvest that's coming. God is providing a harvest and He's asking the church to rise up and to be prepared. Because the laborers are few. Three quarters of the population of this church is neighborhood. Ten-miles radius. Three quarters. Has a population. We're born from 1961 on. There's abundant fruit coming. Are we as a church prepared? The laborers. A few. Jesus in verse three says. Go on your way. Go on your way. See? I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves. Who isn't? That invites you to want to sign up. Yeah. They were really critical. What Jesus is saying is it's so it's a really tough world out there. But I'm sending you. I'm sending you into that world. A world that could eat you up. But I'm sending you. Because the mission is more important than the fear. I'm going to provide, he continues. He says, I'm sending you as the out like lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. I know that that's really upsetting some of you right now. What? No purse. What's with that? No bag, no sandals. Yeah. And then he says and greet no one on the road. In other words, what Jesus is basically saying is I'm sending you out into a community that that feels unsafe to you. It's pushing you out of your comfort zone. And I don't want you to take anything with you. I want you to depend on me. This is my harvest. And I'm sending you. I'm sending you to buy. To depend on me. Trust me to provide for you. And don't greet each other on the side of it. Don't greedy want anyone on the side of the road. But wait a minute. Jesus, aren't you telling us that we're to be good neighbors? He said, Yeah, yeah. But the point of what he's saying is, don't get distracted. The mission. The mission is more important. Stay focused on the mission. The intentionality of what we're called to be and to do, that's critical for us to remember. Because there's a lot of harvest. That's waiting to be picked. And then verse five, he says. Whatever house you enter first say peace to this house. And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person. But if not, it will return to you. There's a lot that I can share with you in this passage. I just want to focus on one thing and then very quickly give some details to that one thing. In verse six, it says, If anyone is there who shares in peace literally in Greek. What this is saying is if you find a son of peace, a son of peace or the way we're going to choose to describe that in more inclusive language if you find a person of peace. Person of peace. I'll come back to that in just a brief moment. Verse seven Jesus says, Remain in the same house, eating and drinking. Whatever they provide for the laborer

deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome, you eat what is said before you cure the sick who are there and say to them, The Kingdom of God has come near to you. Isn't that pretty bold? Jesus sends them out apostles and he says, Hey, when they welcome you. Eat whatever they give you. Which I love. Cure the sick. Wow. So, the authority of Jesus himself comes on to them. Anyone whom he sends, he equips for the task. And then he says, Let the people know that the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of God has come near. Notice back a few verses ago, Jesus is sending these guys and gals out two by two to every town and village that he plans to visit himself. The Kingdom of God is drawing near. Then he says, But whenever you enter the town or town and they do not welcome you go out into its streets and say even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this the kingdom of God has come near. What's behind all of that? The presence of the Kingdom of God is coming, whether people acknowledge it or not. Whether people accept it or not. Whether people want to be a part of it or not. It is coming. It is here. Jesus is coming. And people. You have a choice to make. All right. So, again, we could dissect these verses for weeks. But back to the person of peace. Because this is really critical for us in our series of who's our neighbor and. And won't I be a neighbor to those. Who God has provided. What is a person of peace? A person of peace is someone who is open to you and your friendship, who is open to what you have to say about your faith and how it impacts your life. Person of Peace appears ready to explore spiritual answers for their life questions. A Person of Peace seems open to exploring how faith and Jesus might impact their life. A person of peace is someone who might be willing to share with others what they have learned. God. This may come as a surprise to many of us. I know for many years it did me. God is actually working on the hearts and minds of individuals that we have not yet met. And through the grand grace of God himself, he intersects those individuals with us. And at those intersections, he asks those of us who are followers of Jesus already. To be ready. To be ready for that interaction. Because in God's infinite wisdom, he believes that we have something. That he wants that other person to have. But here's the here's the deal. In order for us to recognize a person of peace, we need to do two things. First, we need to be a person of peace. We need to be a person of peace, which means we need to see ourselves as people who are sent by God, whether we realize it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not. When we said yes to Jesus, it wasn't just to get into heaven. It was to be. A soldier for Christ here and now, an ambassador of hope and new life. We are sent. We need to be a person of peace. We need to be open to developing a friendship with those that we don't know. We need to be open to what they have to share about where they are in their faith or in their spiritual life or in their no faith life. We need to be open. We need to be ready to allow them to have a spiritual doubts and questions and to simply sit with them in their unknowns. We need to be willing to share how our faith impacts our life. It's not it's not converting anybody. We don't convert anybody or the Holy Spirit does that. We simply tell the story. And we need to be willing to continue building on the friendship and sharing acts of grace and love regardless of their faith timeline. There are some individuals who, when they hear our story, it may take them 20 years, 30 years. Before they make a decision for Christ. But we need to be a person of peace ourselves in order to recognize someone else. And we need to actually be looking for those that the Holy Spirit is actually bringing into our lives for a purpose. We need to be looking. If we're sent and the harvest is abundant. But the laborers are few. We need to realize that God is actually asking us to be the laborer. And maybe. Maybe there's a person. Who God is bringing into the intersection of our lives. So who's your one? Who's that person? Who's that person? One of the things that I've been. Challenging myself to do each and every day is to ask that question, Lord, who? Who's my one today? Who's my one today? Whose life are you intersecting with mine today? Who are you sending me? To. As I taught last week. I bring as a back to the place to start this prayer.

And so, I invite you to join with me as we close this message, praying, the prayer that I taught last week, the one that is slightly tweaked from last year. If you're ready. God is inviting us into. Being laborers for a harvest. That harvest is abundant. And it's in our neighborhood. Would you join with me in praying this prayer?

Lord, who do you need me to see? Who do you need me to hear? Who do you need me to know? What do you need me to do? I am your servant. In Jesus' name. Amen.