

Luke 10:25-37
Just Who Is My Neighbor?
WRCoB 2.9.20

Just who is my neighbor?

Is it the person living in my apartment building?
On the same street?
In the same neighborhood?

Is my neighbor the one who attends my church?
Works in the same office building?
Goes to the same school?

Who is my neighbor?

Spenser Perkins, theologian and author
Raises the same question.

*Is a Palestinian a neighbor to an Israeli?
Is a Jew a neighbor to an Arab?*

*For a rich white person
Is a black welfare mother a neighbor?*

*For a poor white, is a middle-class black
Who got where he is through affirmative action a neighbor?*

*For a black male . . . is a white male—better yet
A pickup-driving, gun-rack-toting, tobacco-chewing
Baseball-cap-wearing white man a neighbor?*

For a feminist

Is an insensitive, domineering male chauvinist a neighbor?

For a suburban white family?

*Is the new black, or Hispanic, or mixed-marriage family,
That moved in down the street, a neighbor?*

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I might add, is a Syrian or a Honduran family

Seeking asylum in the US . . . a neighbor?

And finally, after watching Trump's State of the Union

Where Trump refused to shake Pelosi's hand

And Pelosi tore up Trump's speech

Is a Democrat or a Republican a neighbor to one another?

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The answer to this question

Has far-reaching implications.

Because, depending how we answer the question

Defines who we consider a neighbor.

Right?

So learning how Jesus answers the question

Is key to knowing how we

Are to treat the rest of humanity.

You with me?

Ultimately then, the question for us today is just this.

Where's the line between neighbor and non-neighbor?

The people of Palestine during the time of Jesus
Knew exactly who their neighbors were.

They were not the Midianites
Nor the Amorites, the Canaanites
Nor the occupying Romans
And certainly not the people of Samaria.

Everyone knew that!

They were hated enemies.

Neighbor meant people of their own faith and ethnicity.

Can you imagine, then, the shock
Of those listening in on this conversation
Between Jesus and the lawyer

When Jesus uses a hated Samaritan
To illustrate what it means to be a neighbor?

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Our Scripture Lesson today
Is one incredibly important teaching of Jesus.

The lesson is in the form of a parable
A story used to teach a moral lesson.

The Bible entitles it the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

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It was a lawyer, an expert in Biblical law
That challenges Jesus with two questions.

The first question

1 ²⁵ **What must I do to inherit eternal life?**

Knowing the lawyer's skill and expertise

Jesus answers the first question

With a question of his own.

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²⁶ **“What is written in the law? What do you read there?”**

And the lawyer answered.

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Luke 10:27 (NLT) “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus replied, *Good, do this and you shall live!*

However, the lawyer wanted to justify himself.

He considered himself a good neighbor

And asks the second question

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²⁹ **And just who is my neighbor?**

Maybe, as Buechner writes,

Since he was a lawyer

He wanted something precise.

He wanted a legal definition he could refer to in case the question of loving one ever happened to come up. He presumably wanted something on the order of:

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"A neighbor (hereinafter referred to as the party of the first part) is to be construed as meaning a person of Jewish descent whose legal residence is within a radius of no more than three statute miles from one's own legal residence unless there is another person of Jewish descent (hereinafter to be referred to as the party of the second part) living closer to the party of the first part than one is oneself, in which case the party of the second part is to be construed as neighbor to the party of the first part and one is oneself relieved of all responsibility of any sort or kind whatsoever."

The lawyer challenges where Jesus draws the line
Between neighbor and non-neighbor.

What the lawyer didn't expect was Jesus' response.

And in answer to the lawyer's second question
Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan.

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The parable is set in the context of Palestine 30 AD.

The setting, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho
Notoriously known for its robberies.

The characters, a traveler, robbers, a priest, a Levite
A Samaritan, and an innkeeper.

The story, as good stories go
Could easily be set in any context.

The late Rev. Clarence Jordan, Southern Baptist minister
Founder of the Christian community, Koinonia

And founder of Habitat for Humanity

Wrote a book entitled *The Cotton Patch Gospel*.

In the book, he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan

The way it might have happened in his time

In racially segregated Georgia in the 1960s.

His version goes like this.

One day a teacher of an adult Bible class got up and tested him with this question: "Doctor, what does one do to be saved?" Jesus replied, "What does the Bible say? How do you interpret it?"

The teacher answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your physical strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

"That is correct," answered Jesus. "Make a habit of this and you'll be saved."

But the Sunday school teacher, trying to save face, asked, "But ... er ... but ... just who is my neighbor?"

Then Jesus laid into him and said, "A man was going from Atlanta to Albany and some gangsters held him up. When they had robbed him of his wallet and brand-new suit, they beat him up and drove off in his car, leaving him unconscious on the shoulder of the highway."

“Now it just so happened that a white preacher was going down that same highway. ‘When he saw the fellow, he stepped on the gas and went scooting by.

“Shortly afterwards a white Gospel song leader came down the road, and when he saw what had happened, he too stepped on the gas.

“Then a black man traveling that way came upon the fellow, and what he saw moved him to tears. He stopped and bound up his wounds as best he could, drew some water from his water-jug to wipe away the blood and then laid him on the back seat.

He drove on into Albany and took him to the hospital and said to the nurse, ‘You all take good care of this white man I found on the highway. Here’s the only two dollars I got, but you all keep account of what he owes, and if he can’t pay it, I’ll settle up with you when I make a pay-day.’

“Now if you had been the man held up by the gangsters, which of these three—the white preacher, the white song leader, or the black man – would you consider to have been your neighbor?”

The teacher of the adult Bible class said, “Why, of course, the nig – I mean, er ... well, er ... the one who treated me kindly.”

Jesus said, “Well, then, you get going and start living like that!”

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The parable of the Good Samaritan
Broadens the definition of neighbor
To include people we'd rather not include.

The parable teaches that we are to love God
With everything we have
And to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The parable teaches that loving God's ultimate expression
Is found in the way we love our neighbor.

The parable teaches that the definition of neighbor
Has no limits . . . no borders . . . no boundaries!

Spencer Perkins summarizes the parable this way

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Stripped of all the theological debates and boiled down to its raw essence Christianity and Christians will be judged by two actions; how much we love God and how well we demonstrate that by loving our neighbor. This is Christianity in a nutshell!"

If we are to live out what it means to love our neighbor
We must change the question we ask

This is how Martin Luther King, Jr. describes it:

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"The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?'

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But...the Good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'

Just who is my neighbor?

Jesus answers the question, saying
If a Samaritan is a neighbor to a Jew

Then there is no boundary
No border
No delineation
No line

That defines a neighbor from a non-neighbor?

His answer to the question is

YOUR NEIGHBOR IS ANYONE WHO IS IN NEED.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:43-44

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**Matthew 5:43 NRSV You have heard that it was said,
“You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”⁴⁴
But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those
who persecute you”**

Or as the Apostle Paul writes

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**Romans 12:20 NRSV No, “if your enemies are hungry,
feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to
drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on
their heads.”²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but
overcome evil with good.”**

Does it get any clearer than that!