

Luke 10:25-37
Jesus is in the Neighborhood
WRCoB 2.21.21

One night, Brethren John Herr awoke in his farm home
By the noise of thieves in his smokehouse.

He went out and found a thief
Standing at the door of the smokehouse
Taking hams handed to him
By another thief inside.

The thief saw Brother Herr coming
And took off running
Without warning his colleague in the smokehouse.

The Brethren elder took the thief's place at the door
And continued to take the hams handed to him.

The thief inside the smokehouse
Asked how many they should take.

Herr replied that they might as well take them all.

The thief, realizing he was trapped inside
Began to push his way out of the smokehouse.

But Brother Herr told him to take along a ham for his family.

The thief refused, but Herr insisted and reminded him
(A neighbor he recognized)
That if ever he was hungry

Not bother to come at night and wake him up.

Just come he'd give him all he needed if he'd simply ask.

Elder John Herr never revealed the identity of the thieves.
(Brethren Encyclopedia, p. 730 sidebar).

~~

Being neighborly is an important trait of the Brethren.

Being neighborly meant you were always available
To lend a helping hand
To whoever was in need

The neighbor who shared your line fence
The neighbor across town
Or the neighbor halfway around the world.

To Brethren, it is part and parcel of Christian living.

~~

Today's Scripture Lesson is Jesus' parable
We know as the Good Samaritan
One of his most well-known parables.

Jesus told the parable in response to a question.

An expert of the law had asked Jesus
Which of all the commandments
Was **the** most important.

Jesus answered to love the Lord God
With all your heart and strength
And your neighbor as yourself.

The question that prompted Jesus
To share the parable came next.

The expert of the law wanting to justify himself
Asked, "And just who is my neighbor?"

Seriously, it is a question we all have asked
At some point or another in our lives.

Is the car that just went into the ditch
In front of us on I 64
Driven by one of our neighbors?

Does the man or woman seeking a jump start at Walmart
Live in our neighborhood?

Are the residents of Creighton, on the east side, neighbors?

Just who is my neighbor?

~~

The answer to this question
Has tremendous implications.

Because, depending how we answer the question
"Who is my neighbor?"
Defines the borders of our neighborhood.

So learning how Jesus answers the question
Is key to knowing
How we should define neighbor and neighborhood.

And so, the question for us today is just this.

Where do we draw the lines
 Between neighbor and non-neighbor?
 And our neighborhood and someone else's?

~~

The Jews, during the time of Jesus
 Knew exactly who their neighbors were.

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

Everyone knew that!

Neighbor meant people of their own race, faith and ethnicity.

Can you imagine, then, the shock
 Of those listening in to the conversation

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

~~

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

The parable teaches that love of God's ultimate expression
 Is found in how we love our neighbor.

Spencer Perkins, theologian and author
 Summarizes the parable this way.

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!"

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

~~

According to Alan Rudnick
In an article in Baptist Global News

The PBS TV series Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood
Taught a theology of neighborliness
Without ever using the names of God or Jesus.

However, the late Fred Rogers, the producer of the program
Was a devout Christian
And a Presbyterian minister.

He taught children and their parents
What it means to be a neighbor for thirty-one seasons.

Mr. Rogers stressed that all are neighbors to one another
Including people who did not look or act like them.

A theology of neighborliness is what Jesus taught
In the parable of "The Good Samaritan."

A neighbor is anyone needing love, compassion and grace.

Rudnick contends the American church has largely forgotten
This theology of neighborliness.

And it is because many churches have the opinion
They have a corner on the presence of God.

That God's activities are confined
Within the walls of the church.

In reality, God is as active
In the streets of the neighborhood
As God is within the walls of the church.

Many churches can't or choose not to see past their walls
To the neighborhood.

Rudnick says

We have forgotten about the neighbor and the neighborhood. We have forgotten that the embodiment of Jesus' message is not about getting more people in the pews but going forth to live and minister in collaboration with God in the redemption of the world.

Now, more than ever, churches need to discover what God is up to in the neighborhood and then employ a theology of neighborliness that invites and welcomes all, serves all and works alongside their neighbors toward God's justice for all.

~~

So what does it mean to be a church in the neighborhood?

Should we define West Richmond's neighborhood
As solely the geographic neighborhood
Around the church facilities? No.

In an urban/suburban setting that West Richmond is in
The Richmond metropolitan area is our neighborhood.

In the age of internet
Social media is our neighborhood.

The children, their parents, and the staff of our preschool
Is our neighborhood.

The groups we serve,
The Hull Street Veteran's shelter
Senior Connections, Caritas
Is in our neighborhoods.

The differing organizations we are personally involved in
From schools, gyms, clubs, and special interest groups
Are our neighbors.

And all the differing neighborhoods
Each of our church members live within
Is our neighborhood.

And so, where do we draw the line
Between neighbor and non-neighbor?

We don't.
Jesus defines neighbor as anyone in need.
The world is our neighborhood.

Recently, our church denomination
Entered into a compelling vision process

In an age of division and disunity
AC hoped to identify, name and unite
The church under one mission and vision

After much intensive work
Through surveys and meetings
The denomination has come up with
A Compelling Vision Statement.

I am still trying to wear it to see how it fits.

I'm not sure how I feel about it.
It feels a bit convoluted..

However, there is one line in it that I love.

Let me read the whole thing
And then highlight the line I really like.

The statement is in two parts.

Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement.

To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

What I can really identify with is the phrase
through relationship-based neighborhood engagement

Everything else seems a bit wordy to me.

Based on the importance Jesus attributes to loving neighbor
In his response to the expert of the law
This is the key to being faithful followers of Jesus.

If you think about his ministry
How he went around from place to place
Ministering to the differing communities
Throughout the region of Galilee

We see the importance Jesus placed
Upon being out in the neighborhood.

Save for the few times he preached in the synagogue
This is where he spent the totality of his ministry

His neighbors?

Any and all who needed to be neighbored to.

Can neighbor be used as a verb?

Let's use it as a verb and go do some neighboring.

Because Jesus is in the neighborhood
And if we are to follow him
We need to be there too.
For the glory of God and our neighbors' good.