

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).

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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.

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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?

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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?

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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?

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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 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!

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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.*

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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.