

Luke 10:25-37
Welcome a Stranger, Welcome Christ #5
Jesus is in the Neighborhood
WRCoB 8.20.23

Long ago, late in the 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 from another thief inside.

The thief saw Brother Herr coming and took off running
Leaving his buddy in the smokehouse.

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

The thief inside asked how many hams they should take.

Brother John replied they might as well take them all.

Wow! Realizing he was trapped inside
The thief pushed his way out through the door

Brother John told him to take a ham with for his family.

He knew who the thief was.

His last words to the thief were, that if ever he was hungry
Not bother to come at night and wake him up.

Just come in the daytime and he'd give him all he needed.

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

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In this, our final sermon on the sacred art of hospitality
We want to talk about being neighborly.

Being neighborly is an important part of being Brethren.

Being neighborly meant you were always available
To lend a helping hand to whomever 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.

Being neighborly is a big part of Christ's call to hospitality

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Today's Scripture Lesson is the parable
We know as the Good Samaritan.

Perhaps, the most well-known of all his parables.

Jesus was prompted to tell the story
In response to a question by an expert of the law.

The lawyer asked Jesus
Of all the 613 commandments in the Jewish law
Which was THE MOST important.

Since the lawyer was the expert in the law
Jesus answered his question with another question.

What is written in the Law?

What do you read there?

Luke 10:27 CEB He responded, “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.*”

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

The lawyer wanting to justify himself asked

And just who is my neighbor?

Well, you better be prepared
When you ask a question like that to Jesus.

But seriously, it is a question we ask all the time.

Is the house owned by the Jewish couple
That burned down a couple of weeks ago
Are they our neighbors?

Or the car that just went into the ditch on I 64
Are they neighbors?

Are the children at Adams Elementary School
On the eastside, are they our neighbors' children?

Just who is my neighbor?

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The answer to this question has tremendous implications.

Because, depending on how we answer the question
Define the borders of our neighborhood.

So as followers of Jesus
Learning how he answers the question

Is the key to understanding the term neighbor.
And where we draw the line
Between neighbor and non-neighbor?

When do we cease showing hospitality?

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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!

They were all taught that from a very young age.

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

Can you imagine, then, the shock
Of those listening in on 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 wish we didn't have to include.

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!"

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Do you remember, when after Jesus rose from the dead

He was seen preparing breakfast for the disciples

As they were fishing?

When they came to shore

Jesus and Peter had this conversation.

Jesus asked Peter three times

"Do you love me?"

And Peter answered three times, "I love you"

And Jesus then responded by saying, what?

Three times, Jesus responded by saying, "Feed my sheep"

Three times!

“Peter, do you love me?
Jesus, you know I love you!
Feed my sheep!”

Three times!

So whats that about?

To me, it means just this.

That the fullest expression of love of God
Is carried out in service to others.

This is where the love of God and love of neighbor meet.

This is the union of the greatest two commandments.

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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.

Mr. Rogers stressed that we 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.

Or as I have been saying
The lost art of hospitality.

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.

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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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, the parents, and the staff of our preschool
Is our neighborhood.

The groups we serve,
The Hull Street Veteran's shelter
Senior Connections, Feed More
These are the church's neighborhoods.

The differing organizations we are personally involved in
From schools, gyms, clubs, and even pickle ball
They are our neighborhoods

And all the differing neighborhoods
That each of us live within is our neighborhood
From the east side to the west end and beyond

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

We don't.

A neighbor is anyone and everyone.

However, with a church like ours

A more regional church

We haven't been as neighborly as we could

Here are some ideas how we can engage our neighbors.

1. Host a neighborhood block party with food, games, and live music. Have church members mingle and get to know the neighbors
2. Start a community garden on the church property and invite neighbors to have a garden spot
3. Host monthly movie nights at the church, open to all. Free cotton candy and popcorn.
4. Offer free English lessons or citizenship test preparations for immigrant neighbors
5. Start a free gently used clothing closet and small food bank open certain hours each week
6. Offer free tutoring or after school care for neighborhood kids by vetted church volunteers
7. Mail welcome packets to new move-ins with info about the church and invitations to events.
8. Go door to door and ask neighbors how the church might pray for them or help meet needs
9. Offer co-working space during the week to solopreneurs and entrepreneurs

If you think about his ministry

How Jesus 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.

Being neighborly extended
Beyond his hometown of Nazareth.

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.

So as individuals and the church
Let's go and do some neighboring.

Because Jesus is in the neighborhood

And if we are to follow him
We need to be there too.

Matthew 25:40 KJV Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.