

Sermon Manuscript: Luke 10:25-37
We Are the Kind of Neighbors People Need – Pastor Greg Ewald
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10) – July 10, 2022

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." [NIV]

It was Christmas Eve. The snow was falling gently from the sky creating the often longed for "White Christmas." Walking down the sidewalk of the quiet town, a town right out of a Norman Rockwell painting, the three men started up the walkway of the house that had a sign hanging out front. It had a single word on it – "Orphanage." This house contained a number of children whose parents had died, or unfortunately, didn't want them. They entered the house and could smell the special meal that was being prepared for these children. As they entered the main room, they saw the fire burning in the fireplace and the Christmas tree with its twinkling lights. There were no presents under the tree. In fact, this was the reason they were there. Slung over each of their shoulders was a cloth bag filled with presents. Under each carefully wrapped gift were toys, and clothes, and treats, gifts that were intended to bring joy and happiness to these children. The children gathered around them. One by one they handed them out. With a gleam in their eye, each child took their presents and scooted off to a corner of the room to see what treasure lay hidden beneath the wrap.

The three men stood there and watched, noting the reactions of each of the children. The children were excited. They were happy. They were joyful – all except for two. Off in one corner, they noticed a little boy and girl, siblings about 8 and 10 years old sitting there with their gifts sitting on the floor in front of them. With the fire's light reflecting from their eyes, they could tell that those eyes were filled with tears. One of the men walked over to them. He knelt down beside them and asked them if everything was okay. The little girl looked up at him and said, "Oh mister, my brother and I thank you so much for the presents you have given us, but there's one thing we want more than anything in the world." "And what is that?"

the man asked. And the little girl said, *“We want to be loved.”* The man stared at the girl for a moment, and then he put an arm around the little boy and the little girl and assured them that everything would be all right. He knew how they were feeling because he too had been an orphan. He knew the empty feeling inside. But thanks to a family who loved him very much, a family who adopted him and raised him in a loving environment, that feeling was gone. Now he could not help but encourage this little boy and girl with the love he had received from his loving parents. That love had made him to be a good neighbor to those in need.

In many ways, you and I are like this soldier, aren't we? Once “orphaned” from

God and His love, living under Satan's rule, we too have been adopted into a most loving family, haven't we? In fact, you and I have been adopted into the most loving family of all ---- *God's* family. We are loved by God, and through the precious gift of faith He has given us; we now live in a loving environment, an environment encapsulated by God's always present, always perfect love. You and I share a fellowship that is centered and anchored in the love of Christ, a love that in turn makes us good neighbors, the best neighbors, the kind of neighbors everyone needs. This is what we are being led to realize as we look at this text before us this morning. In fact, we are being led to realize that **WE ARE THE KIND OF NEIGHBORS PEOPLE NEED ... because WE KNOW THE SAVIOR'S LOVE** which empowers us **TO SHOW THE SAVIOR'S LOVE.**

It's the love that Christ has *for us* that makes us good neighbors, isn't it? **“We love because he [Christ] first loved us,”** the apostle John writes. This is the wonderful truth the Savior has revealed to us through His wonderful Word, the same wonderful truth He is trying to convey to this man here in our text. We are told that this man is a learned man. He is an expert in the law, that is, a scholar well versed in scripture. And yet, in his conversation here with Jesus it becomes evident that he doesn't understand scripture at all! He doesn't know that Jesus is the heart of scripture. He doesn't understand Jesus. He doesn't know what Jesus is about. He doesn't understand the meaning of God's love. In fact, this becomes obvious right off the bat when he answers his own question, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** with the answer that *he* must love God above all things and his neighbor as himself. He must be perfect in order to inherit eternal life. And Jesus doesn't disagree with him, does He? No, in fact, Jesus says, **“Do this and you will live.”**

Can you imagine the look on this man's face? Do you think he is a little confused, a little bewildered? Here he is, filled with pride over his knowledge of the scriptures, trying to trap Jesus in His words, trying to take Jesus down, and from all appearances, it seems as though Jesus is saying the same thing that he and his fellow scribes and Pharisees are saying – *“Perfection gets you to heaven.”* *“You need to be perfect to inherit eternal life.”* Is this what Jesus is really saying? Yes, it is. In order to get to heaven, you must be perfect. You must love God above all things, and you must love your neighbor as yourself – perfectly in thought, word, and action – all the time - always. The person who can do this perfectly is perfect, and perfection is the only price accepted by God to enter heaven.

This expert in the law knows this and feels a bit embarrassed that Jesus is saying the same. This isn't the reason he asked Jesus the question. No, the reason he asked the question is because he is trying to discredit Jesus. He cannot accomplish this if Jesus is agreeing with him, or even worse, making him look foolish for answering his own question. And so, to justify himself, to justify his argument, to justify his reason for asking his initial question, he asks Jesus, **“And who is my neighbor?”** *“You see Jesus, my initial question wasn't such a dumb question after all, was it?”* Without realizing it, this man has just set Jesus up for the message this man needs to hear.

This man is focused on himself, on keeping God's commands so that God will love him and reward him for his efforts. As Jesus stands before him, this man is blind to God's love. This man firmly believes that God loves Him *because* of how faithful he is in doing God's will. Bending God's will, twisting God's Word to make it conform to his ideas of what perfection is, is what this man is guilty of doing. We know people like this man, don't we? We know people who don't like to admit that they're wrong, people who want to change the rules or stretch the truth to make it conform to what they want it to be, either to feel good about themselves, or to make themselves look good. In fact, we see these kinds of people all around us, don't we? In we see this person every time we look in the mirror, don't we? Even more, we see this person every time we look in the mirror of God's holy Law.

All of us have this inherited nature in us, this sinful nature we carry with us wherever we go, don't we? We have this nature in us that likes to direct us away from God and focus us on ourselves. We have this nature in us that likes to take control of our thoughts and lead us to think this way: *"When I feel good about myself then God must feel good about me too. And in order to feel good about myself I have to make sure that I'm good. And in order to make sure that I am good, I might have to change the rules a bit. Oh sure, I'm a sinner, but I'm not as bad as the murderers I read about in the news, or the person driving recklessly down the highway, or the person who uses foul language.*

Oh, I'm a sinner, but God understands. Sure, I'm not perfect, but nobody is, so I'm sure God overlooks my flaws. What other choice does he have?"

Does God overlook our "flaws," which are really called "sin"? No, He doesn't, does He? Instead, He puts His loving hands on each side of each of our heads and gently turns them until our eyes are focused on Calvary's holy mountain. Against the backdrop of an ugly scene, He has us looking at Jesus, beaten and bloodied, hanging on a cross and dying for us. And then He allows us to hear Jesus' agonizing scream as Jesus suffers the horrors of hell, being punished for every sin in the world, every sin from the very first one to the very last one committed, yours and mine included, including those times we have failed to be a good neighbor.

As we focus on this picture, as we understand its significance, we are reminded that we don't contribute a God-pleasing thing to its significance, do we? Rather, we are the recipients of what we see transpiring on that holy hill. We are the beneficiaries. The darkness, the earthquake, the temple curtain torn in two from top to bottom, the lifeless body of Christ laid in a tomb, His glorious resurrection on the third day, all shout the good news that we are reconciled to God! God Himself paid the price He demands for us to experience and enjoy eternal life in heaven. He has made us *perfect* in the blood of Christ. Like a parent placing the admission ticket in the hands of each of his or her children, God has done the same for us. Heaven is our home - so great is His love for us!

It has been said that an artist can look at a pretty woman and see the old woman she will become. A better artist can look at a pretty woman and see the pretty girl she used to be. But a great artist can look at an old woman, portray her exactly as she is and enable the viewer to see the pretty girl she still is. Jesus is better than the greatest artist of all, isn't he? Just look at what He has done to us. He has changed how we look on the outside by changing what we are on the inside. At one time, Jesus saw our filthy and selfish minds, our sinful actions, and our bitter hatred for God. He smelled the repulsive stench of our sin. Yet, He has cleansed our hearts and purified our actions. Through His suffering and death, He has washed us clean and has clothed us in the fragrant robes of His perfection. Through His suffering and death, He now enables our heavenly Father to see us as the perfect children He created people to be in the very beginning. And He did all of this out of His pure, perfect, and unconditional love.

We know this, don't we? By God's "Oh so wonderful grace," (by His wonderful love that we do not deserve), we know the Savior's love. We are the recipients of it – every day – everywhere we are – everywhere we go. We are God's children, adopted into his family of believers forever. As the recipients of such love, we know what true love really is, don't we? We know what the most important thing is when it comes to being the best a neighbor can be, don't we? It is sharing the love of Christ with those who know Him, and maybe even more importantly, with those who don't. In His love, God has made you and me the kind of neighbors' people need. We know the Savior's love which empowers us TO SHOW THE SAVIOR'S LOVE.

Christ love compels us to be His ambassadors, doesn't it? In fact, this compelling desire is found in the Savior's definition of what a neighbor is. He tells this "expert in the law" about a man who goes down to Jericho but along the way falls into the hands of robbers, is beaten, stripped, and left for dead. A Priest and a Levite, men of God, workers in the temple, come along but they avoid the man in need. They continue on their way. They have no time or interest or whatever to tend to a blood brother in need. And then along comes this *Samaritan*, a foreigner who could have continued on his way as well because he had no national or blood relationship with the injured man. In fact, the Jews despised his race. But this Samaritan, coming upon this man felt compassion. He bound up the man's wounds, put the man on his donkey, took him to an inn, and paid for the man's stay for as long as he would need a room in order to recuperate. He even promised to pay more if it were needed.

"And so, dear expert in the Law," Jesus says, **"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"** The "expert in the law" replies, **"The one who had mercy on him."** And he is absolutely correct. *Everyone with whom we come into contact is our neighbor.* And this is why Jesus says to this man, **"Go and do likewise."** In other words what Jesus is saying to this man is simply this, *"Don't be content with knowing who your neighbor is, but rather ask yourself the far more important question, 'To whom can I be a neighbor?' For you see,"* Jesus says, *"God has taken care of making people right with Him. This is why I'm here! So, with this taken care of, with heaven as your home purely because of God's love, look at what you can do to help others to see me in you. Go and do as this Samaritan did."*

This is Jesus' message to us as well, isn't it? With His love burning brightly in our hearts, a fire fueled by God's promises given and fulfilled at Calvary, we are encouraged to reach out and help those who are in need, those who are suffering hurt or want, those who are feeling overwhelmed by the pressures of a sin-filled world.

Every day we are being given the opportunity to brighten a person's day with a gesture of love, a handshake, or a smile just to let them know that they are special, not only in our eyes, but more importantly, in God's eyes. The people God brings in and out of our lives are the people we want to serve, because like us, they too are sinners who through Christ's death on Calvary have been robed in righteousness. Some of those with whom we come into contact already know this and so we can encourage them with beautiful reminders of God's loving promises and presence in their lives. And for those in our lives who do not yet know the Savior's love, we have a beautiful message to share, don't we? We have a beautiful message that is sure to pick them up and give them never-ending love – true love, the kind of love that brings *everlasting* peace, comfort, solace, and joy. Dear brothers and sisters, WE ARE THE KIND OF NEIGHBORS PEOPLE NEED. To God alone be the glory! Amen.