

“The Neighbor”

Our Threshold Moment stated, **“Who is our neighbor?”** “The parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us that the outsider is our neighbor, perhaps even more a neighbor than the so-called ‘insiders’ across the street. Neighbors act with love and grace when it is least expected. Who are the neighbors in your life and how are you called to be a neighbor, inviting and welcoming in spite of perceived differences and disagreements?”

Did you know near the end of the month is **National Good Neighbor Day**? President Jimmy Carter initiated the first National Good Neighbor Day. It seems this is a good time for us to be considering the subject of **“Who Is My Neighbor?”** and **“What Does It Mean to be a Good Neighbor?”**

One of my first thoughts about our Theme, “The Neighbor”, was remembering **Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood**. Obviously, I did not watch it while I was a child. Has anyone else seen Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood? Early in each episode, Mr. Rogers would enter the building singing, taking off his shoes, putting on his comfortable shoes, and putting on his sweater. Although Mr. Rogers died some years back, PBS has another children’s show, which has its roots in Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood. It is an animated program titled, **“Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood”**. One of its activities repeated in every episode is Daniel Tiger putting on his shoes and singing some of the same lyrics Rev. Fred Rogers sang at the beginning of his shows. Some of the words to that song are:

“It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood

A beautiful day for a neighbor

Could you be mine?

Would you be mine?”

At one point in Mr. Rogers’ Song he would sing:

“I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you

I’ve always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you”.

Given the polarization in our Society and the attempts to separate and divide everyone into mutually hating groups, what Mr. Rogers sang and Daniel Tiger echoes may seem extraordinarily naïve and childish. So, am I embarrassed to confess I still like Mr. Rogers’ Song? No. **In fact, I believe it is very much in line with what Jesus called the lawyer to do in our Scripture Reading. Friends – neighbors, you and I have that same call from God and Jesus Christ!**

Our Scripture began with a question, which sounds quite reasonable and appropriate given our culture today. The lawyer asked Jesus in **verse 25, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Please take note, the expert in the Law asked a question about how he could obtain something very valuable for himself. He was very self-centered and selfish.

Also note, Jesus did not answer the man’s question, instead he led the man to answer the question for himself to force him to realize what was much more important. Hopefully, most of us are familiar with the Biblical quotation the lawyer responded with. In **verse 27, “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.’”** Since the questioner knew the Biblical answer to his own question, why did he ask Jesus? It could have been to trap or trick Jesus but I suspect that was not the case in that situation. Instead, the lawyer did not like the Biblical answer because it required living in a much less selfish manner than he wanted to and was living. Indeed, the Greek word used for love was agape, which is suffering and sacrificial love for another’s benefit. The man was unwilling to let things go at that point, so he asked a follow up question to help him find the way to be totally selfish and still receive eternal life. He asked Jesus in **verse 29, “And who is my neighbor?”**

Having prodded the man to ask a question, which would lead to a more revealing result, Jesus told the **Parable of the Good Samaritan**. Jesus told the parable much like the way a present day standup comedian would have, instead of the approach a religious teacher of that day would have used. Jesus made the **villainous characters two men** very much like the lawyer and his friends. He made the **hero of the story** someone, who would have been hated by the questioner and his allies. Jesus rubbed salt into the wounds of the legalist, which he had created through his sarcasm, by forcing him to acknowledge the identity of the neighbor from among the three men, who came upon the

victim laying on the road. The lawyer could not bring himself to speak of the character in the same way as Jesus had – as the “Samaritan”. Instead the man replied in **verse 37a**, *“The one who had mercy on him.”* I guess Jesus thought the lawyer had suffered enough for the moment because of his humiliation for his hypocrisy, so Jesus concluded his point saying in **verse 37b**, *“You go, the, and do the same.”*

Since Jesus told the lawyer and us to follow the example of the Good Samaritan, we might ask with David Loose, **“What does the Good Samaritan do?”** Loose answered his question, “Three things, I’d suggest. **First, he sees the man in need ... Second, the Samaritan not only sees the man in need as a neighbor, but he draws near to him, coming over to help. ... the Samaritan instead goes to him, and becomes vulnerable in that closeness. ... Third, after seeing him and coming close, the Samaritan has compassion on him, tending his wounds, transporting him to the inn, making sure he is taken care of.** Seeing is vital, drawing near imperative, yet the final and meaningful gesture is that the Samaritan actually does something about it. Compassion, in this sense, is sympathy put into action.” Loose pointed out, “And these three inter-related moves – seeing, drawing near, and having compassion – offer us an example of what it is to be Christ-like, for God in Jesus saw our vulnerability and need, drew near in the Incarnation to embrace us, and in the cross took action by identifying with us to the very end, rising again so that death could no longer dominate us.” (“The God We Didn’t Expect” by David Lose posted on davidlose.net)

Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt explained her experience of realizing she had not been paying enough attention to her neighbors – she had not been a good neighbor to them – had not followed the example of the Good Samaritan. Hunt wrote, “I don’t know how it is that I can have sat at the same desk for a year and a half and had my eyes so closed.” **“It took a woman in a black burqa and two little girls to get me wondering.”** Hunt noticed the woman and two little girls only after they passed by her and only, then, did she try to talk to them. They did not stop to listen to her, perhaps for fear of being verbally attacked outside a church. Hunt continued, “Now that my eyes have been opened, now that I’m starting to see I’m trying to figure out how to take the next step and get to know the neighbors who walk by every day. I expect some of them will have great need, not unlike the victim of robbers in this familiar story now.” **“I’m fairly certain many of them have been passed by over and over again by those of us who should know better – including me.”** “For while it’s no road to Jericho outside my office window, if they’re walking by it’s fairly certain the neighborhood they call home has its fair share of challenges.” Hunt concluded, **“More than anything, I know for certain they are all God’s Own and for that reason as much as any I am called to open my eyes and see them.”** “As the Samaritan did in the story Jesus told. As Jesus did and does for all of us. I don’t know what happens next, but I’m also confident this ‘seeing’ will probably lead to discoveries I haven’t yet imagined.” (“Who Is My Neighbor?” by Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt posted on <words.dancingwiththeword.com>)

As David Loose pointed out “seeing” is only part of what we, like the Samaritan, are to do. Remember Loose said, **“Seeing is vital, drawing near imperative, yet the final and meaningful gesture is that the Samaritan actually does something about it.”**

How are you and I going to do something about our Neighbors in Need? Well, I have some concrete suggestions. In a couple of weeks, on **World Communion Sunday, October 6th**, we will receive the **All Church “Neighbors in Need” Mission Offering.** Maybe, this year is a good one to make a larger than usual offering for that Special Offering. Another opportunity is the CROP Hunger Walk. **The CROP Hunger Walk helps our local, national, and international neighbors.** Consider being one of our Walkers and/or a donor of our October 12th, CROP Walk. **Sign up online by going to the internet address printed at the conclusion of the CROP article near the bottom left hand of the Welcome Page.** Finally, when you see someone in need of support, whether you know them or not, at least ask, if you can be of help. Maybe they need to know they are Agape Loved by God and they need to receive our **Divine Parent’s Invitation and Welcome into the New Relationship with God and All People.** Maybe they need to know someone actually cares about them. I’m not asking you to carry everyone’s burdens. However, each of us can help a Neighbor in Need as we become aware of the need. **Let’s be like Mr. Rogers and seek to invite and welcome All People – to be our Neighbors.** Amen.