



from the desk of ...

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## DO YOU LOVE GOD? DO YOU LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR?

**Luke 10:25-37**

It's September, school is up & running, so I thought it might be appropriate to begin this morning with an academic question. If I were to ask what God requires of us in our relationship with Him ...

what would be your answer? ...

Some of you might respond with words from Deuteronomy. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, & with all your strength."

(Deuteronomy 6:5) And, of course, you'd be absolutely right.

And then if I were to ask another academic question ... what does God require of us in connection with our neighbor? I believe you'd answer even more rapidly that our responsibilities are to love them too.

Paul states that love is fulfilling the Law. "The only obligation you have is to love one another." (Romans 13:8)

But, what if I were to make the questions more personal & specific ... "do you love God?" I suspect you'd think about it & then respond ... "Yes, I do love God."

And on the surface, at least, there's little I could do to prove you wrong. Because your relationship with God is an intensely personal thing.

Something known to Him ... something known to you.

But if I were to ask the other question ... "do you love your neighbor?" That's a little more difficult.

"Well, that depends. Do you mean the folks that live next to me on my street or in my building? ... Or are we talking about all of Rolling Meadows? ... Or the whole Chicago area? ... Illinois? ... The U.S.? ... You know, I'm not sure that I can honestly answer that question.

I really don't know who my neighbor is."

It's interesting, but essentially that same conversation comes to us out of the pages of Scripture. This is a familiar story for most of us. But the point Jesus made continues to be extremely applicable today.

So, listen to *Good News*, as recorded by Luke, to you who have gathered here for worship at C.C.R.M.

Within your hearing now comes the Word of the Lord ...

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?"

Jesus answered him, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

The man answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind'; and 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'"

"You are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live."

But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answered, "There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.'"

And Jesus concluded, "In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man attacked by the robbers?"

The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who was kind to him."

Jesus replied, "you go, then, and do the same."

(Luke 10:25-37)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

A teacher of the Law comes to question Jesus. He's not really seeking an answer ... what he wants to do is increase his reputation as a scholar at the expense of this Galilean peasant. So, he has the whole conversation mapped out in his mind. He knows how he'll begin, & then how he expects Jesus will answer, & finally, how he'll reply. And it's not long before, in his mind at least, he has Jesus backed up against the wall.

So, he begins the conversation with one of the greatest questions men & women have ever faced.

"Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?"

I admire Jesus' restraint. Jesus doesn't say to him, "That's a stupid question for you to be asking."

Jesus responds ... "You're a teacher of the Law,  
what do the Scriptures say?"

I suspect this guy was taken back a little by Jesus' answer. Here he had come for some theological sparing, & Jesus was treating him like a novice. I mean just about anyone who grew up in that society knew the answer to that question. So, he blurted out the reply ...

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, & with all your mind;  
& Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Jesus responds ... "That's a good answer.  
Do that & you will live."

And suddenly this teacher realizes that he was caught in his own trap. He was like a school boy who had been allowed to make up his own examination ...  
& then he preceded to flunk it.

Certainly, he didn't have any problem with the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the exam. Everybody in town knew how religious he was. It was that 2<sup>nd</sup> part that got under his skin. So "wanting to justify himself" he asked ... (X)  
"Who is my neighbor?" He wanted a definition of terms.

We can empathize with that, can't we? How many times do we come face-to-face with the clear requirement of Scripture, but instead of obeying it ...  
we want to talk about it, we want to discuss it?

Because if we talk about it long enough, in just the right way, instead of bending our lives to fit the Scriptures ...

we can turn the Scriptures a bit to fit our lives.

And it was in that spirit that he asks the question ... "Who is my neighbor?"

And when Jesus answers, He doesn't give a long theological discourse. He doesn't even tell him that there are several Greek words for "love". Instead, he just told a story. And it's one of those stories that lies like a boobytrap on the pages of Scripture.

It's the story of a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked by robbers, who stripped him & beat him up, leaving him  $\frac{1}{2}$  dead by the side of the road.

In the story, a priest, then a Levite, came down the same road, saw him ... & passed by. (X) Then a Samaritan came, stopped, & lent a hand. And at the end of the story Jesus asked ... "Of these 3, the priest, the Levite, & the Samaritan, who was the neighbor?"

And this teacher, who couldn't even say the word "Samaritan", replied, "the one who was kind to him." To which, Jesus said, "You go, then, & do the same."

Now from that very familiar story Jesus gives the answer to the question ... "who is my neighbor?"

It's important to realize that in answering his question Jesus took the man out of his world of theology & put him into another world; a world known to 1<sup>st</sup> responders, ambulance drivers, & E.R. workers. And it's there that he found the answer to his question ...

"who is my neighbor?"

Helmut Thielicke (X) the German theologian said that in studying these stories of Jesus, the viewpoint is everything. Then to illustrate what he meant, he told about the time his son was just a little baby. He held the youngster up in front of a mirror ... the baby moved ... the reflection moved ... the baby waved ... the reflection waved. And then suddenly the youngster's face lit up & he realized ... that's me!

Every so often that happens when we're reading the Scriptures. Here's this black print on a white page, stories of long ago. But every now & then as we're reading, the print seems to disappear & on the page we see a reflection of ourselves.

So, the question is ... "who is my neighbor?" And the answer to that depends on the viewpoint we take.

In the viewpoint of the man who had been attached by robbers, beaten up, & left  $\frac{1}{2}$  dead ... just about anybody coming down the road, anybody willing to stop & lend a hand, would qualify completely as a neighbor.

That's the way it is, isn't it? ... We're driving down the road & our car makes some strange noises & comes rolling to a stop. And we don't have the tools or the skill to fix it. Just about anybody willing to stop at that moment & lend a hand, qualifies completely as a neighbor.

It's when the other fellow's car has come to a stop, & we're zipping along ... we can sit behind the wheel & define "neighbor" with all the preciseness of a shyster lawyer.

When Marty was just a boy, as we were sitting at the dining room table, I asked him what he had learned in S.S. that morning. He told me they had the story of the Good Samaritan, & then he preceded to give me a blow-by-blow description of what had taken place.

When he finished I asked ... "Son, what was the spiritual lesson of the story?" He thought for a moment ... "that story teaches that whenever I'm in trouble, you gotta help me."

Well, that's not the complete answer, but from the viewpoint of that poor guy on the side of the road, it's a practical way of identifying a neighbor.

But obviously the people who occupy centerstage are the priest & the Levite. If that fellow by the side of the road were making a list of candidates for neighbor, the priest & Levite would be right up there at the top.



Tradition tells us that before they left their homes each morning they quoted those 2 great verses of Scripture. "Love the LORD your God with all you heart, with all your soul, & with all your strength." And "love your neighbors as you love yourself." (Leviticus 19:18)

Who then would better qualify as a "neighbor" than the ones who knew the verses! But Jesus said that the priest came down the road, saw the man ...

& "walked on by on the other side."

Hard to understand how that could happen. How one human being could see another human being in desperate need ... & not do anything.

Sounds a lot like what happened a couple of years ago on a Washington D.C. metro. 24-year-old (X) Kevin Sutherland was brutally murdered ...

while a # of witnesses sat in their seats on the train!

But that wouldn't happen with us here in Rolling Meadows. ... Well, if you're thinking that you're still outside the story. Because I'm sure that priest had some perfectly sound reasons for doing what he did. Since he was a religious type,

I suspect they were "good religious" reasons.

Back in the O.T., the Law stated that if a priest touched a dead body he became ceremonially defiled.

(Leviticus 21:1) So I can imagine that priest saying to himself,

"I'd really like to do something, but it would be just my luck for this guy to die in my arms. Then I'd have to go through all the rites of cleansing. (Numbers 19:12) And there's an expensive sacrifice that must be made."

Now I don't know if he thought that way,  
but I know that we do sometimes.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> man coming down the road was a Levite. If the priest was like the Pastor of the Church, the Levite would be like a Deacon. He took care of the day-to-day ministry of the synagogue.

But Jesus said that he too "walked by on the other side."

We have to wonder what went through his head.

"I'm on my way up to Jerusalem. I've got a Deacon's meeting tonight, & we'll talk about this. Maybe we can start a ministry for those who are attacked on the road."

Now I don't know if he thought that way or not, but I know that that's an easy mindset for us. There's this strange idea of ministry where we talk about programs or services to help nameless people out there ...

but somehow, we don't get our hands dirty here.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> man that came down the road was a Samaritan. If the priest & Levite were at the top of the list for being a good neighbor, the Samaritan would be at the very bottom. The Jews & the Samaritans hated each other with a deep & longstanding passion.

Whenever a Jew talked about a Samaritan he called him a "dog". Yet Jesus said that when this Samaritan came down the road & saw the man "his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil & wine on his wounds & bandaged them." He then put him on his donkey, took him to an inn, sat up with him through the night, paid the bill, & then promised that if there were any additional charges he'd take care of them.

When Jesus finished the story He asked, "which of these 3 do you think was a neighbor to this man? The 2 who knew their theology?

Or the one who stopped to help?"

The teacher, not willing to even utter the name "Samaritan," said, "the one who was kind to him."

"Jesus replied, 'You go, then, & do the same.'"

From that story, we get the answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?" Jesus is saying that our neighbor is anyone whose need we see, whose need we're in a position to meet. It's as simple as that.

Our neighbor is anyone whose **need we see**, whose need God has put us in a **position to meet**.

Now there are some things we put into "neighbor" that Jesus excludes. Our neighbor, for example, can be someone who's unknown. There's no indication that this Jew & Samaritan had ever met previously.

That's one the drives behind foreign missions. The Carwell's felt God's call to go tell the Good News to people in Haiti ... whom they had never met.

Your neighbor may be unfriendly. The Jews & Samaritans were deep & longstanding enemies. Your neighbor may be someone who rubs you the wrong way, who doesn't appreciate what you do for them.

Your neighbor may be unlovely. There's nothing particularly attractive about a guy lying in a pool of blood on a dirt road. You may have a neighbor whose lifestyle you don't approve of.

Your neighbor may cause a financial burden. There's no evidence that that the man ever paid the Samaritan back for all he did.

Sometimes in our Churches, & I admit this to our own shame, we reach out to people, not for what we can do for them ... but for what they can do for us.

Jesus is saying that our neighbor is anyone whose need we see, a need that God has put us in a position to meet.

And buried in the story is a reminder that there's a **cost**. One thing certainly is a willingness to be involved. We have to stop, we have to give our time, we have to lend a hand. And I'm speaking for each of us now, we live a fast pace life, & the hardest thing to give is time.

We have to stop & get involved.

And then, of course, there's money. This Samaritan put out 2 silver coins ... that was, at least, 2 days' wages, with a promise that there would be more, if needed.

He gave his money, he gave his time, he got involved with someone who was unknown, unfriendly, unloving, & unrewarding. Because our neighbor is anyone whose need we see. A need God has put us in position to meet.

It's clear as we read this passage that all 3 men saw the same thing. All 3 men saw a stranger who had been mugged. But in a very real way ... all 3 didn't see the same thing. One man may have seen a ceremonial defilement. Another saw a possible ministry outreach.

Only the Samaritan saw his neighbor.

But, if we stop & ponder we'll discover a deeper truth ...  
what I am **determines** what I see.

You & I go to an art museum. You appreciate good art. We walk up to one painting & you say ...

"Look at that. That's art!" I look at it ... "that's art?" Same picture. The difference isn't what's hanging up there on the wall. The difference is what's inside.

What we are determines what we see.

When I was a boy, each week I had to memorize a Bible verse in S.S. I remember learning one from 1 John.

"If we say we love God, but hate others, we are liars.

For we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen." (1 John 4:20)

I remember, even as a kid, how that verse really was a struggle for me. 1<sup>st</sup> of all, I've never liked being called a "liar," much less having someone question my commitment to God. I've always loved God. It's easy. God's good! But, on the other hand ... let me tell you about my cousins, Bruce & Brian. Then there were the bullies at school, Jack & Gary. My 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, Miss Martin. Those were truly awful people. They were about as far away from God as I could imagine.

No way did I like them, much less, love them.

But over the years I've discovered that the Christian life is not objective ... the Christian life is subjective. Christian love does not **reside** in the person out there being loved ...

it **resides** in the person **doing** the loving.

And the same love that enables me to love my Father in Heaven empowers me to love my neighbor on earth.

That teacher of the Law thought he had God in his pocket, but when he answered as he did, he told Jesus 2 things. That he didn't really know much about loving his neighbor. But even more so, he didn't know much about loving God either. Because the same love that **enables** us to love our Father in Heaven, **empowers** us to love our neighbor on earth. What we are determines what we see. And what we see determines what we do.

Remember the little rhythm we learned as children? (X)

Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been?  
I've been to London to see the Queen.  
Pussy cat, pussy cat, what saw you there?  
I saw a wee mouse, under the chair.

London is an incredible city. I've been there twice.  
Tower of London. Big Ben. Trafalgar Square.  
Westminster Abbey. Buckingham Palace:  
the changing of the guard, the residence of the Queen.

And the cat's been there. And now she's back, &  
showing her pictures, & telling her friends all about her  
trip.

"Pussy cat, did you get to the Palace?" ...

"Yes." ...

"Pussy cat, did you get inside?" ...

"Yes, I walked right in. Security didn't stop me." ...

"Pussy cat, was the Queen there? Did you see her?" ...

"Yes." ...

"What did she look like? What did she have on?" ...

"Well, I really didn't notice." ...

"Well, Pussy Cat, what did you see, when you were in the  
Palace, in the presence of the Queen?" ...

"Underneath her chair was one of the nicest little mice  
you'd ever want to see."

When you have the heart of a pussy cat,  
mice are infinitely more important than Queens.

What we are determines what we see.

What we see determines what we do.

Mother Teresa said (X) ...

"Because we cannot see Christ we cannot express our  
love to Him; but our neighbors we can always see,  
& we can do to them what, if we saw Him,  
we would like to do to Christ."

What we learn from Jesus' story is that being a  
neighbor has nothing to do with how near we live to  
others, or how similar our religion or race. Being a  
neighbor depends simply on our humanity ... & on need.

Anyone you or I come in contact with who has a need  
is our neighbor. And to love our neighbor means to care  
enough to reach out, & help in any way we can.

What we are determines what we see.

What we see determines what we do.

So ... (X) do you love God? ...

Do you love your neighbor? ...

My neighbor is anyone whose need I see  
Anyone God has put me in position to meet.

It's as simple & as difficult as that.

**MARANA THA**