

## “*Serving Your Neighbor*”

*Luke 10:25-37*

August 1, 2021

Hospitality has long been viewed in the South, and in other parts of the country, as a cultural and social way of life. Being a good neighbor, not only on the street where we live, but in our community, in our Church, with the stranger, and people in need, is our calling as Christians. This morning Jesus has a message for us about stepping up to a radical level of love by living radical hospitality.

In his three-year ministry, Jesus is countercultural in the people he reaches out to, loves, and serves. Jesus looks deeply within each person he meets to see their true nature. He discerns what lies behind the mask people wear. He searches their heart, mind, and soul hoping to find goodness, compassion, and love. / Jesus accepts the hospitality of everyone he encounters regardless of their social status. Jesus reaches out to those considered socially unworthy and unacceptable. He approaches tax collectors, the poor, and others considered outcasts, with compassion, care, and love. He never discriminates based on ethnicity or acceptability based on Jewish law and customs. Jesus freely reaches out to and heals lepers, and associates with Romans and Samaritans, all considered ritually unclean. He does not give difference or care what the rich and privileged think including the political and religious elite. In Luke Chapter 10 Jesus teaches a strong message challenging the deeply engrained values of a people supported by the religious establishment in Jerusalem.

It is a message that challenges us today.

***Luke 10:25-29:*** *“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?”*

The story of the Good Samaritan is one of the most well-known parables of Jesus. The setting for this story is the notoriously dangerous seventeen-mile journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. The road runs through narrow passes offering hiding places for bandits known to terrorize travelers. One of these victims has been robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead. His attackers leave him with nothing to identify his status except his desperate need for help. He could be a Jew or a Gentile, but the crowd would assume he is a Jew. Jesus tells the story from this man’s point of view. His Jewish audience can identify with compassion this innocent victim of random violence.

The characters in this story, in addition to the victim and Samaritan, are a lawyer, a priest, and a Levite. The lawyer is a Temple specialist in God’s Law, Commandments, and the Purity Code. He stands up in the crowd to test Jesus, and possibly to display his learning and intellect. He asks Jesus what he must do to enter heaven? Jesus replies by turning the question back to him, and the lawyer quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, and Leviticus 19:18: we are to Love God and our neighbor. When Jesus validates his response, the lawyer again tries to test him asking, “who is my neighbor?” Jesus will answer in a story the important question the Lawyer could have asked: “How am I to love and obey God, by loving and serving my neighbor?”

We will briefly examine the relationship between Jews and Samaritans to understand how a first century Jew and Samaritan would hear in the command to love one another. In Judaic society there are boundaries with rules on how Jews should treat each other, and treat Gentiles including Samaritans, and how men should treat women. Because these boundaries allow certain groups to establish position, power, and privilege, maintaining them is vital to social order. These rules become a religious duty. One boundary is treating Samaritans as ritually unclean. They are descendants of mixed marriages from the Assyrian conquest of Israel 700 years earlier. They worship the same God and observe the same Law and Commandments as their supposedly devout, pure-blooded cousins.

***Luke 10: 30-32:*** *“In reply to the Lawyer, Jesus said: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by 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.”*

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In Luke 10, verses 31-32, as a traveler approaches the injured man has hope that help is on the way. By his appearance he is a Priest of the Temple in Jerusalem and would be expected to help. The Priest sees the helpless, bleeding man. But the injured man's hope is crushed as the Priest passes by. No reason is given, but no reason justifies his neglect of this man in desperate need. By Jewish Law, if a Priest finds a corpse, he has a duty to bury it. How much more would he owe a man beaten nearly to death?

A Jew from the tribe of Levi, known for their strict observance of the Law, approaches giving the man renewed hope. But the Levite ignores him and continues on his way. I wonder what is going through his mind as he decides to ignore the suffering of this badly beaten man. I wonder if his conscience bothers him and if regret or guilt follows. Both the Priest and Levite recognize he is seriously injured and could be a fellow Jew. By abandoning him they violate the heart of God's command to serve and love one another. I suspect the crowd around Jesus is beginning to wonder where this parable is going.

**Luke 10: 33-35:** *“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, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii 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.”*

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once preached on the parable of the Good Samaritan, saying, “I imagine that the first question the priest and Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’” But by the very nature of his concern, the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

Shattering all expectations of the crowd, Jesus teaches a third traveler, a Samaritan, approaches the wounded man. The Samaritan is overcome with compassion. He does not see a Jew, but a man in desperate need of help. Despite living his entire life feeling despised and rejected, he tends the man's wounds and takes him to a nearby inn. He is not wealthy but leaves a generous sum of money with the innkeeper to pay for his care. He has nothing to gain by helping this stranger. His original purpose that day becomes a secondary consideration. The Samaritan's radical hospitality, love, and care is shocking when compared with the behavior of the Priest and Levite, considered holy by the people. The Lawyer and Crowd standing before Jesus are stunned.

Jesus challenges the contempt for people considered unworthy by making a Samaritan the hero of the story. Jesus demolishes all their boundary expectations. He is clear that social position, wealth, race, or nationality count for nothing in the eyes of God. Community can no longer be defined or limited by such terms. The Samaritan's actions not only challenge the hearer to examine their stereotypes but invalidates all prejudices they and we may have for those considered “others.”

**Luke 10: 36-37 (NIV):** *“Jesus asks the Lawyer: “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.”*

In the final scene of the Parable, Jesus' question puts the Lawyer in the distasteful position of naming a Samaritan as neighborly above the Priest and Levite. So, he replies the neighbor is “The one who showed him mercy.” Being neighborly is the selfless expression of our love and care for people as God's messengers of mercy.

Stephen Covey writes in his “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” about a “neighborly” experience he had on a NYC subway. It is Sunday morning, and the passengers are sitting quietly, napping, reading the paper, lost in thought. This changes when a man and his children suddenly get on-board. The children are rambunctious, and loud. They are yelling, throwing things, and even grabbing people's papers. Covey finally turns and kindly says, “Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you could do a little more to control them?” The downcast man lifts his gaze and turns to Covey and says softly, “Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died an hour ago. I don't know what to think, and I guess they don't know how to handle it either.” Covey later writes, “Can you imagine what I felt at that moment? Suddenly I saw things differently, and because I saw things differently, I thought differently, I felt differently, I behaved differently. My irritation vanished...my heart was filled with

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the man's pain. Feelings of compassion and love flowed freely. "Your wife just died? Oh, I am so sorry! Can you tell me about it? What can I do to help? Everything changed in an instant."

To love and obey God and love and serve our neighbor is our calling. How we "love our neighbor as yourself" is our journey each of us takes with Christ. / He assures us in Luke 22: 27 that "I am with you as one who serves." Jesus is within and beside us as we move forward in radical love and hospitality serving our neighbor. Jesus teaches anyone in need is our neighbor. And anyone who has love and compassion in their heart serving another is that person's neighbor. This includes our Samaritans, the so-called "others" we may encounter. Our willingness to step up and follow Jesus serving our neighbor is our gift of love rendered unto God.

**Closing Prayer:** O Lord, help us to remove the lenses that are filters we use in setting boundaries in our dealings with people. Help us to recognize that all persons in need are our neighbors and we are to love and care for them as Christ loves and cares for us. Grant that we follow the example of the Samaritan in doing what we can to ease the suffering and hardship of others. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.