**WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?**

Given by Craig Minke on July 25, 2022

**“Is the glass half empty or half full?”**

* In other words, are you pessimistic or optimistic?
* In our life struggles we face, it’s tempting to see the glass as half empty.
* Paul reminds us that whenever we feel empty or lost, we have a good Father who completely fills that void with love and understanding.
* Our gospel reading today is taken from Luke, **where Jesus defines the term “neighbor” and sets a high standard for loving others.**

**ILLUSTRATION:**

*Let’s say you are walking down the street and is approached by someone who appears unwashed, with soiled and tattered clothes, and smells of alcohol.*

*In your mind you give the person the title of “homeless”. The homeless man is clutching a cardboard sign with his unfortunate circumstances scrawled in thick black marker. His entire life is reduced to a couple of sad sentences and a plea for help.*

*With red, weary eyes, the homeless man looks at the man and asks, “Can you please spare some change?”*

**Now, you have a decision to make!!!**

* You have money in his pocket. Maybe it is not a lot of money. However, you knows that you have more than the homeless man, whose entirety of possessions are stuffed into plastic shopping bags at his feet.
* Should you give the homeless man something, knowing that he could spend that money on booze?
* Won’t that be making his problems worse?
* Will you be crippling the homeless man by making him dependent on charity instead of on hard work?
* Or, by not giving him money, are we depriving a fellow human being in need of a warm meal to eat?
* **If we believe we are a Christian, are we not supposed to help the poor?**
* But, when do the needs of the poor encroach upon our own personal needs?
* Maybe the problem is that the smallest bill we have in our wallet is a $20 bill. Do we really want to give $20 to a stranger?
* We wonder if it is rude and selfish to ask a person wearing rags for change.
* All of these questions and more race through our mind as we avert his eyes and walk away without saying a word.

**I think we can all identify with this classic moral dilemma to some extent.**

* If you are anything like me, you found the story a bit unsettling because it hits so close to home.
* For all of us, the situation touches on a fundamental question, **“What do I owe my fellow human being?”**

Few questions are more important. **The question lies at the heart of every government law, every company policy, and every rule of etiquette**.

* What do I owe my fellow human being?
* The answer to this question shapes our interactions.
* Yet, as we look at our society and our history, it seems like humanity struggles to come up with good answers to this question.
  + Poverty is still with us.
  + Homelessness is still with us.
  + Sexism is still with us.
  + Racism is still with us.
  + Child abuse is still with us.
  + Human trafficking is still with us.

If we truly cared for others,

* if we made sure that everyone had what they were owed, would not these things disappear?
* What do I owe my fellow human being?
* The truth is, apart from God, we do not have any hope of adequately answering this question.

**Thankfully, Christ gives us the answer to this fundamental question.**

* What we owe our fellow human beings is to be a good neighbor to them.
* However, what does it mean to be a good neighbor?
* Jesus defines neighbor in such a way that **becoming one is a lifelong pursuit**.
* Let’s look his profound teaching, commonly referred to as the parable of the Good Samaritan:

**LK 10:25-37 25On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

**26“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”**

**27He 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.”**

**28“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”**

**29But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

**30In reply 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.**

**31A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.**

**32So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.**

**33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.**

**34He 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.**

**35The 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.’**

**36“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”**

**37The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”**

**Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”**

**In this conversation with the expert in the law, Jesus did something extraordinary.**

* The expert asked, “And who is my neighbor?” The way the man phrased the question placed himself in the role of judging neighborliness.
* **In other words:** he was asking Jesus how he was to decide who was worthy of his love and concern.
* The expert in the law assumed his own neighborliness and wanted to know how to tell who was deserving of it.
* In his response, Jesus flips the legal expert’s question on its head.
* After telling a righteously disruptive story, Christ asked, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”
* The way Jesus phrased his question makes neighborliness something **that can only be determined by the person in need.**
* According to Jesus’ teaching, neighbor is not something that we judge in ourselves, rather it is something **we strive for others to testify us to be**.
* Are we going to be a neighbor to the person in need?
* Our personal neighborliness cannot be assumed.
* *Every day Christ-followers are called to participate in the life and work of Jesus,* 
  + *being led by the Spirit,*
  + *prayerfully hoping to bring glory to the Father*
  + *by being a neighbor to someone in need of one*.

**Jesus’ beautiful concept of neighbor is challenging for all believers. It is a high standard to reach because it requires us to show care for every person we encounter.**

* We naturally want to define neighbor for ourselves.
* Like the legal expert, we want to decide for ourselves who is worthy of our attention and care.
* We unconsciously develop our own rationale for deciding who gets excluded from our love.
* Following Christ means giving up a vote in who is and is not our neighbor.
* It calls on us to see all human beings as our neighbor.
* Not all neighbors will see us as neighborly unless we provide them with what they want.
* It’s vital to understand we are called to serve and be servants to others, but they are not called to be our masters.
* Jesus is our master.

**Our neighbor is the one the Spirit leads us to and the one the Spirit leads to us.**

* We have no say
  + in how they look,
  + how much money they have,
  + how they smell,
  + the color of their skin,
  + the country of their origin,
  + their gender,
  + their class,
  + language spoken,
  + political affiliation, or attitude.
  + We cannot even control whether or not they say “thank you.”
* Whomever the Spirit causes us to encounter, they are our neighbor, so we must be neighborly.
* How do we go about being a neighbor?
* Are there limits to neighborliness?
* For answers, we turn to Christ’s teaching.
* There are three things I would like us to take away from the parable.

1. **Being a neighbor is defined by Jesus**

* First, the most important fact about the parable of the Good Samaritan is that Jesus is the one telling the story.
* He is the one who defines “neighbor” because he is the source of neighborliness.
* In telling the parable, Jesus designates the Samaritan as the neighbor.
* Given the ethnic and religious animosity between Jewish people and Samaritans, naming the Samaritan as the hero of the story was scandalous to Jesus’ audience.
* In addition to a not-so-veiled condemnation of prejudice, Jesus makes the point that he will use whomever he wishes to be a neighbor.
* In our own strength, we are self-focused and incapable of pure neighborliness.
* However, when he is the one narrating our story, we can be extraordinary neighbors.
* It is only in Christ that we can truly love others, so we must be dependent upon him.

1. **Being a neighbor requires action**

**Second, being a neighbor often requires action on our part**.

* In the parable, the status of priest or Levite did not make either man a neighbor.
* Perhaps they even said prayers as they passed by the man left for dead on the road, but that still did not make them neighbors.
* Similarly, being a Christian does not necessarily mean that we are being neighbors.
* James talks about the need for us to show our faith by our deeds ([James 2:18](about:blank)).

**JS 2:18 18But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.**

* We are not able to intervene directly in every situation, but whenever we can, we should act as a neighbor.
* In the story Jesus told, the actions of the Samaritan can be summarized into three categories: place-sharing, promotion of health, and provision.

1. **Place-sharing:** (action)

* The first thing the Samaritan did was go to the place where the beaten man lay.
* The Samaritan occupied the same physical space as the survivor and was moved with compassion — he occupied the same emotional space.
* Place-sharing is a term attributed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and refers to an empathetic relationship that is based upon Christ as the ultimate Place-Sharer, which causes people to mutually share joys and sorrows.
* We can assume that neighborliness requires proximity, which we achieve through place-sharing.

**AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:** *Why is it important to place-share with those to whom we would like to be neighborly?*

1. **Health promotion:** (action)
   * The next thing the Samaritan did in the parable was promote the health of the survivor.
   * He treated and bandaged the man’s wounds. Similarly, being a neighbor may require us to seek the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of those whom the Holy Spirit causes us to encounter.
   * We, too, should seek to bandage wounds.
   * This cannot be done apart from the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
   * We need to look to him to discern what people truly need.
   * It is important to note that what a person asks for and what they need are sometimes two different things.
   * In the story I told in the beginning of the message, about encountering a beggar asking for money.
     1. In some cases, money is exactly what the person may need.
     2. In other cases, the person may need us to listen to their story with compassion.
     3. Maybe a smile and kind word is what is needed.
     4. In some cases, the Spirit will move us to buy the person a meal.
   * The point is we will not know how to promote the health of another person unless we are willing to submit to the Spirit.
2. **Provision:** (action)
   * **The last way in which the Samaritan showed himself to be a neighbor was through provision.**
   * Two denarii was enough to provide the man with food, water, and shelter.
   * On top of that, the Samaritan offered to pay for any additional expenses incurred by the innkeeper as he saw to the survivor’s basic needs.
   * The survivor still needed things like clothes and medical care, and the Samaritan could not disengage until those needs were met.
     1. Our impact on our neighbors would be marginal if we are unable to meet their basic needs.
     2. Sometimes that is direct aid, but other times our neighborliness takes the form of helping our neighbor access available services and resources.
     3. In any case, we should not overlook those who cannot meet their basic needs.
   * In Acts, we see members of the Christian community selling their possessions in order to provide for the poor.
   * How far are we willing to go to provide the basic needs of our neighbors?

**Our neighborliness requires action, which takes the form of place-sharing, promotion of health, and/or provision.**

1. **Being a neighbor has a cost**

* This brings me to the third point I would like us to take away from the parable of the Good Samaritan: being a neighbor is **inconvenien**t and **costs us something**.
* This is why, as Christ-followers, we must imitate our Lord and **embrace interruptions.**
* We must appreciate **discomfort** and **inconvenience.**

**AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:** Can you think of a time when God interrupted your plans in order to give you an opportunity to be a neighbor?

* We cannot expect to follow Christ in comfort.
* We cannot expect opportunities to be a neighbor to line up with our calendar or agenda.
* How much of Jesus’ ministry took place while he was on his way someplace else?
* Similarly, the Samaritan was on his way someplace else.
* Who knows what business was delayed by being neighborly?
  + The oil and wine applied to the survivor’s wounds had another intended purpose.
  + The money paid to the innkeeper was earmarked for something else.
  + On top of that, the Samaritan risked his very life because he had no idea if the robbers were still in the area.
  + Stopping for the survivor could have made the Samaritan the next victim.
* Yet Jesus is asking us to do what is necessary to be a neighbor.
* **We may have to wake up every day asking the Holy Spirit to interrupt us for his purposes.**
* We should **pray to be moved out of our comfort zones** so that we can be a blessing to others.
* May we **NOT BE** like the priest and Levite who were so wrapped up in being religious that they neglected to be good.

**Being a neighbor is inconvenient, costly, and sometimes involves risk.**

* Perhaps we will not have to risk our lives like the Samaritan.
* However, allying with the poor, the outcast, the sick, and the abandoned may have a social or relational cost.
* People may speak poorly of us or break relationship with us if we share the place of those our society values least.
* However, in being a neighbor we become more like Christ, the perfect neighbor.

**When humanity sinned, we became mortally wounded spiritually.**

* Like the man on the road to Jericho, sin destroyed us and left us to die on the side of the road.
* God saw us with empathetic eyes, and Jesus drew near to us.
* Jesus became one of us and shared our place.
* Through his broken body and spilled blood he healed our wounds and made us better than healthy.
* He made us new.
* Even now, Christ is preparing a place for you and me.
* His provision is perfect and will never end

**AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:** *Looking at the encounter you may have had with a “homeless” man, what are some neighborly ways we can react to being asked for money?*

**What do I owe my fellow human being?**

* Christ provides the answer and he, himself, is the answer.
* He is the one writing our story and is the source of neighborliness.
* He directs our actions and makes us neighbors.
* He perfectly showed us how to live interrupted and inconvenienced for the Father’s glory.
* May we imitate him as we encounter those whom the Spirit brings into our path.
* May they look upon us and see a neighbor.
* May they look upon us and see Christ.

**CLOSING PRAYER**