

FGBC: Hospitality & Justice: The Neglected Neighbour

Luke 10: 25-37

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We all know that we live in one of the best countries in the world. Life expectancy alone settles that. So women here can expect 84.1 years and men can expect 80.2 for an average of 82. That's some of the longest life expectancy in the world. In the States the average is 79, in Mexico it is 76, but there are all sorts of countries in the world like Nigeria where it is 53 or Afghanistan where it is 50 or Chad where it is 49.¹ Is anyone feeling close to mid-life crisis?

Now everyone still dies in Canada, and 270,000 people die here every year. But we don't die from diarrhea, Malaria or Tuberculosis. We are fortunate enough to die from things like cancer which kills 74,000 Canadians a year or heart disease which kills another 48,000.² These are disease many people in the world don't live long enough to die from. But there is a darker killer that goes unchecked in records like these.

In Canada, in 2016, there were 481,343 reported pregnancies – almost 500,000, but 1/5th of them, 97,764, were terminated by abortion. Abortion is the leading cause of death in Canada.³

Now I don't need to tell you that abortion is a touchy subject. It's 2019, and we are perhaps the most sophisticated we've ever been as a people. Certainly more than ever before we are concerned with the rights of minorities and the vulnerable – and this is a great thing. But these changes haven't gone uncontested. Probably lots of us in this room have felt that from time to time that some of the changes have gone too far.

Now why is that? Well, primarily it's because whenever rights are in question there is always a struggle of the powerless against the powerful. So to fight for women's rights means to challenge the status quo of men. To fight for minority rights means to challenge the status quo of the majority. Historically to fight for the abolition of slavery meant to limit the rights of the free – they weren't allowed to own people anymore. And these struggles are always hard. And so now as a society we find ourselves struggling to balance the rights of the unborn vs. the rights of the born – particularly women.

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Now politically this debate revolves around whether the unborn is a person. And this is where the argument lies because both Pro-choice and Pro-life groups agree that the murder of a person is immoral regardless of mental disability or physical handicap or ethnicity or anything else. Everyone agrees that all people have the right to life whether they can argue this for themselves or not. But if the unborn is not yet a person then this right does not apply. That's the question both sides of the debate want to answer.

¹ <https://www.infoplease.com/world/health-and-social-statistics/life-expectancy-countries-0> (Accessed March 16, 2019)

² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310039401> (Accessed March 15, 2019)

³ https://abort73.com/abortion_facts/canadian_abortion_statistics/ (Accessed March 15, 2019)

Now I have opinions about this, and so do you. Some of your opinions line up with mine and others may not. And if we debated here we could fight, but we couldn't come up with a conclusive answer. And so here is where this becomes a sermon.

Once Jesus was asked to take a side on a similar question. And Jesus answered the question differently than either the Pro-life or the Pro-choice groups are answering today. And that's what I want to get into.

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If you've been with us over the last five weeks we've been in a series called "Hospitality & Justice." And in this series we've been looking at one of the major themes in scripture which is Jesus' call for His followers to make the world a better place.

Palestine was better when Jesus showed up – people were getting healed, relationships were restored. And similarly, Prince George should be better because we are here. But better doesn't mean fluffy and nice.

So, we started the series in Luke 4 with Jesus preaching to a bunch of people from His home town. And at first they were excited when He said He had come to preach good news to the poor and freedom for captives. But then when He told them His good news wasn't for them, it was for the people they were oppressing and didn't care about they tried to throw Him off a cliff.⁴

The reality is whenever justice for the poor and vulnerable is inconvenient to the wealthy and powerful it is unpopular. This means it's likely to be unpopular with us.

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Now today we are going to be looking at one of Jesus' most well-known parables which can be found in Luke 10. You will want to follow along so open your phone or the Bible in the pew. We are going to pick it up in verse 25 with a lawyer or Pharisee attempting to trap Jesus in a question.

Now as you are turning there you need to know that lots of people tried to trap Jesus in impossible to answer questions. So, they asked Him "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar?" If He says "yes" the Jews are going to hate Him. If He says "No" the Romans are going to kill Him. Or, "What is the greatest commandment?" These questions are kind of like asking someone "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?"

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But every time Jesus encountered one of these wrong questions He changed it into the right question and asked it back. So watch for that. Let's pick it up in verse 25.

[Read Luke 10:25-29]

⁴ Luke 4:16-30

This is the context for the story of the Good Samaritan. It starts with the lawyer asking, “What do I have to do to live forever?” That’s a good question but notice the motive in verse 25 – he isn’t interested in learning anything, he wants to test Jesus. And so Jesus gets him to answer his own question.

But then, because he doesn’t want to look like an idiot, he digs into the debatable part of the equation – not everyone agrees about who qualifies for being a neighbour.

Now Jesus can get this wrong. If He says Romans are our neighbours, the Jews are going to revolt. If He says Samaritans are neighbours, the Jews are going to laugh Him out of town. But if He says no to either of these groups that’s the wrong answer too. So the question is a trap. “Jesus, who do we have to love if we are going to gain eternal life?” There is no right answer, but there are lots of wrong ones.

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Now you’ve probably realized that Jesus isn’t talking about abortion here, but here’s the parallel. At the center of the abortion question lies the impossible to answer question: Does the unborn qualify as a person I need to be compassionate towards?”

So very few people are asking whether the unborn is human – that’s obvious. And nobody is wondering whether it is going to grow into a person, that’s obvious too. But what is not obvious is where we draw the line. What defines something as a person that has rights? In effect “Who do I have to love? Who is my neighbour?”

And the Pro-choice and Pro-life movements are answering this question differently, and there is no consensus. But there are a lot of hateful and angry words coming out of both sides of the debate.

So look at verse 29 and how Jesus handles this impossible question:

[Read Luke 10:29-37]

Now did you notice what Jesus does here? The question starts out “Who is my neighbour” but Jesus changes it. He thinks this is the wrong question, so He tells a story that ends in verse 36 asking the lawyer: “Which of these three was a good neighbour?” He has changed the question from “Who is worthy of my love?” To “Are you the kind of person who loves the weak and vulnerable?”⁵ Here’s the story:

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is 25Kms of treacherous trails through rocky terrain in a desert. It’s not a fun walk, and in the first century it was dangerous. There were Bandits.

So this guy heads out by himself and gets mugged. And that’s when two religious people pass by on the road – a priest and a Levite. But they don’t help! It’s a foreigner, some Samaritan everyone hates, who shows up and in verse 33 “takes pity on him.”

⁵ This point adapted from John Piper <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/love-your-unborn-neighbor> (Accessed March 15, 2019)

Now again, think of the question the lawyer asked, and notice that Jesus doesn't answer it. He asked "Who am I obliged to love as a neighbour?" But the story isn't about the worthiness of the man in the ditch. We don't know anything about him. If Jesus had answered that question the story would have been like one of those jokes: a Liberal, a Conservative and Jagmeet Singh walk into a bar. And the question would be do any of them have potential for good government?

But Jesus doesn't tell that story. He flips the question on its head from "Who qualifies for my help?" to "Am I the kind of person who helps?"

And in verse 37 the lawyer knows who he wants to be like. And Jesus says "People who live like this are the ones who get eternal life." Now, you don't earn eternal life by loving people, but sinners who have been transformed by grace are always looking out for the weak and vulnerable. So Jesus says "people who've won at life, live like it."

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Enter the abortion question. Most of the argument is about the status of pre-born human life and whether it qualifies for compassion. But if we answer this question we are going to end up angrily expressing our opinions and beating people down. And isn't this exactly what's happened? Haven't we done a great job of convincing the world that we are a bunch of angry, judgmental haters, or else we don't care at all? Isn't the church today a lot like the people who tried to throw Jesus off the cliff?

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Friends, we've got to stop answering the wrong questions, and start asking ourselves the right ones. So here are a couple:

First, did Jesus save you when you were a wretched enemy bent on His destruction. Or did you deserve your salvation because you are a good person?

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Depending on how you answer that question you either are a Christian or you aren't – Jesus only saves sinners.

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Second question: Do you see how much it cost Jesus to offer you your salvation, or was your salvation just part of a cheap package that God extended to everyone kind of like the "Special price just for you offered by Tellus in an unaddressed envelope in your mailbox"?

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Again, the way we answer this question matters. There is no cheap salvation. Jesus knows you were a wretch and aren't much better today. In spite of being saved you still sin essentially throwing your salvation back in His face. God knows that about you, but instead of saying "If that's the way you are going to be then go to hell, He decided to become a man, take your slap in the face in person, and die in your place. That is the cost of every Jesus-follower's salvation.

So if you've received a compassionate and costly grace the final question is "Do you want to be the kind of neighbour Jesus was, or are you going to argue semantics?"

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So, who needs a neighbour in the world of abortion? There are at least two groups of vulnerable individuals here – there are the women who are trapped in unwanted pregnancies. If you've been there it's a scary place to be. If you haven't, it's really easy to be judgmental. But stick a sock in it because Jesus isn't impressed by ignorant judgment. Our ignorant judgment cost Him His life! So be compassionate.

Did you know that when asked almost 50% of women who have had abortions say their main motivation was fear that this was the wrong time to have a baby or that they couldn't afford a baby now.⁶ They need a neighbour!

The second group of vulnerable individuals are the unborn who are also trapped in an unwanted pregnancy. They need a neighbour!

Now if we are going to be the light of the world we need to stop pitting these groups against each other and find a way to be compassionate and love them both.

So imagine what it would look like for the church to show up at the Pro-choice rally, not with posters of opposition, but with gifts that actually cost us something – maybe Starbucks cards and hand written notes expressing Jesus' belief that these women are valuable and worthy of being heard and worthy of compassion and love.

Or what if instead of trying to end abortion the church offered adoption or fostering as a viable alternative to trapped women and the trapped unborn?

Now I don't know a ton about fostering and adoption, but I know a couple people who do. So Dave and Janine, would you join me on stage. Now lots of you know Dave and Janine. Dave is the program director out at Ness Lake Bible Camp, and both these guys are awesome people that I look up to. So I'm excited to have them here.

- 1.) Tell us a bit about how your family is different from most families, and how it got that way.
- 2.) What kinds of kids end up in the fostering system?
- 3.) How big is the need for foster parents in Prince George?
- 4.) What are the dangers Christians fall into in the fostering system and what does it mean for you as a couple to image Christ in this system?
- 5.) Is fostering a job for superheroes, or do you think average people can actually handle taking this on? And more importantly, do you believe this is something we are called to as Jesus followers?

⁶ <http://theconversation.com/who-chooses-abortion-more-women-than-you-might-think-99982> (Accessed March 15, 2019)

Fort George, compassion is not free, it has cost. In verse 35, after getting his hands dirty bandaging the beaten man and then taking time out of his day to care for him, the Good Samaritan paid for the man's health care. A neighbour takes the cost of the weak and vulnerable upon themselves.

Friends, it's time to stop watching TV and get ready to do hard things!

There are no undebatable answers to the questions the world is asking, but Jesus' call in this text is that we stop answering the wrong questions, and start asking ourselves the right ones. So will you risk looking like Jesus to the world? Will you love in the face of hate to make sure all the weak and vulnerable are heard? And are we as a church going to be the kinds of neighbours Jesus was?