

In March 1964, 28 year old Kitty Genovese was on her way back to her Queens, New York, apartment at 3am when she was stabbed to death by a serial rapist and murderer. According to newspaper accounts, the attack lasted for at least a half an hour, during which time Genovese screamed and pleaded for help.

Newspaper reports after Genovese's death claimed that 37 witnesses watched the stabbings and failed to intervene or even contact the police until after the attacker fled and Genovese had died.

How do people stand by when someone else is in trouble, especially in a case like this? Surely somebody would pick up the phone, or yell out, or come out of their apartment to intervene. But they didn't.

Psychologists call it the Bystander Effect. A social psychological phenomenon where we think, if there are other people nearby, someone else will help. In our Bible passage today, Jesus tells a parable about a victim and a group of bystanders. A parable that asks us, how would we react in that situation? And what does our response say about our hearts...

We'll stick around and we'll find out what Jesus says about that in just a minute.

INTRO

Well good morning and welcome to Yountville Community Church! My name is Dan Bidwell, Senior Pastor here and it is so good to have you with us today.

We are in the second week of a little sermon series exploring what it means to Love God and to Love our Neighbors. Those two concepts are right at the heart of who we are as a church, as we seek to *share the hope of Jesus in the Napa Valley and beyond*. We long to live out our faith in Jesus, not just within the church family, but as we go about our daily lives in the wider community, and in every aspect of our lives.

If you want to find out more about what that means, I encourage you to join us, in person or online as we keep listening to God in the Bible, as we encourage one another in small groups, and as we invite people to meet Jesus through our Sundays and our midweek Alpha groups.

So why not take a moment now to head to our website – www.yountvillechurch.org – and fill out a Connect Card. Let us know where you are up to in the journey, how we can pray for you, and how we can help you take next steps in following Jesus.

If you are one of our financial partners, thank you for helping us continue to share the hope of Jesus throughout this extended period online. Your generosity is appreciated, and when we reopen in person (hopefully not too long from now), you'll be able to see the way that God has been working to sustain and grow our church in spite of the challenges we have faced. If you would like to support our gospel ministry in the Napa Valley and beyond, you can find all the details on the Give tab of our website.

But that is enough news for now. It is time to turn our attention to God's word, so why don't we pray then we'll open the Bible together.

Our heavenly Father, teach us today what it means to love our neighbor. Help us to love even when it's not easy. We pray in the name of Jesus who showed us what love is, by giving up his life for us, for the forgiveness of sins. Amen

INTER

Our passage today begins with a question that goes straight to the heart of religion. It's a question that many people ask, especially as we are faced with the reality of death. The question is this:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25)

It's a good question, isn't it?

And I suspect we'd all like to know the answer. If there's a checklist for getting into heaven, what's on it? Show me so I can tick off all the good things I have done...

And for the man who asked this question to Jesus, an expert in Jewish religious law, it was a particularly important question. Talk about checklists – the Old Testament contains 613 commandments – 248 *do's* and 365 *do not's*... That's a lot of things you must and mustn't do to inherit eternal life...

Most of us just know the 10 Commandments, and even then we usually just remember Thou Shalt Not Murder, Thou Shalt Not Steal, and that's pretty much it.

So the question's a good one. *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Jesus knows the man is a Bible expert, so Jesus asks *him*:

²⁶ *"What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26)*

The expert replies:

" '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.' " (Luke 10:27)

Good answer, Jesus says. It's actually the same answer that Jesus gave in Mark 12 when somebody asked him about the greatest commandment. We saw that last week... Perhaps this 'expert' was there that day. We don't know.

But the same as Jesus, he sums up all 613 laws into 2 commands: Love God, and Love Your Neighbor.

"Do this," Jesus says, "and you will live." (Luke 10:28)

So all you have to do to inherit eternal life, is to do that. Love God, and love your neighbor. That's all.

Now we talked last week about what it means to love God with *all* your heart, soul, mind and strength. And we agreed it's the word 'all' that's scary there – we can imagine loving God with a bit of our hearts, minds, soul and strength, but God demands *all* from us... But that was last week's sermon.

Today we're thinking about what it means to love your neighbor *as yourself*.

Now if the command was just 'Love your neighbor,' I think we could all tick the box. Yeah, I love my neighbor. Tick – good to go for eternal life.

But it's the fine print that's the hard bit.

Jesus doesn't just say, Love your neighbor. He says: Love your neighbor *as yourself*...

Just think about that for a minute – it's easy to say: love your neighbor as yourself, but doing it is much harder.

- It would mean treating your neighbor the way you would want to be treated...
- Treating them the same way as you treat yourself.
- Loving your neighbor like they were your own husband or wife or your child.
- It means loving them from the heart, and being willing to share everything you have with them...

This raises the bar for what 'love for your neighbor' looks like, doesn't it? It sounds almost impossible. Who could love their neighbors like that? Who could tick the checklist for this one honestly?

PAUSE

Now, if there any lawyers listening, I wonder if you spotted the loophole in Jesus' command?

The lawyer in our story spotted the loophole. Come to v29. If the command is to love your neighbor, then we need a definition for who counts as my neighbor.

"Who is my neighbor?" the lawyer asks...

Jesus answers with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

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

³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (Luke 10:30-32)

We have to remember the cultural context of this story – Jesus is speaking to a group of Jewish religious teachers. And in his parable, those first two people who walk past the injured man are a Jewish priest and a Levite. The Levites were the Jewish tribe who looked after the temple.

So Jesus is telling us that two religious men, two holy men, two church leaders had the chance to help this victim of violence.

But they don't. They both see the man on the ground, and they cross to the other side of the road and they walk right past him.

But not the third passerby. v33:

³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins 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.' (Luke 10:33-35)

The Samaritan is amazing, isn't he? He takes pity on the man, puts him on his own donkey, takes him to an inn and takes care of him himself. Then when he has to go, he gives enough money to the innkeeper to look after the man until his return, along with a promise to pay back any extra expenses incurred.

The Samaritan looks after a complete stranger at great personal cost. And out of the three characters in the parable, we want to be like the Samaritan, don't we? Because the Samaritan is the one who does the right thing – he's the only one who loves his neighbor.

But for the Jewish audience listening, this ending to the parable is a hard pill to swallow.

Jews didn't get along with Samaritans at all:

- Actually they considered the Samaritans religious traitors who had stopped following Judaism correctly.
- *Whereas the Jews*, they were the keepers of the true faith, the guardians of real religion. Especially the priests and the teachers of the law...

But Jesus' parable cuts right through their vain religious exterior – he says that their religion is useless without love. ***They might keep all the rules to the letter of the law, but it's the heart that matters.*** And God looks at the heart, not the checklist of rules...

I had my own Good Samaritan a few years ago, back in Sydney. I was walking towards the mall to get my lunch, and just outside, in the sunshine was an old lady slumped in her walking frame. You know, the kind with the seat. She was prob in her 90s. It was a gorgeous day, she was not far from the bus stop. As I walked close, she looked up just a little and smiled at me. I thought – cool she's OK. And forgot about her completely.

Anyway, about a half hour later, I was walking back towards my office, and she was still there. In exactly the same spot. Still slumped over.

Walking up the hill the other way was a stream of people. At least 3 or 4. Just as I got close, a lady walking up the hill looked down at grandma, and gave her a smile like: Oh, she's so sweet sitting there in her walker. I'll just let her rest a while...

I interpreted that as, little old lady is OK. So I kept walking. I walked right by, and all the way back to my office. All the time thinking, I wonder if she was OK. What if she was exhausted, or dehydrated? Or hypoglycemic. I should have stopped and said, "Are you OK? Can I call somebody to come and get you?"

But I didn't.

I assume she was ok, but honestly I'll never know the answer.

And so this question of 'Who is my neighbor' has been getting under my skin all week. God is telling us here to open our eyes to the people outside our normal sphere of influence and to start seeing them as neighbors. And to love them, as you love yourself.

So the question for us as a church is, who is my neighbor? And how should I love them?

Not Just The Easy

There is a temptation for us to look around and say, my neighbors are the people I'm closest to. And so I'll love them. My friends, my family, maybe the people I talk to at church. They're my neighbors, and they're the ones I'll love as I love myself. They're easy to love, and so I pick them as my '*neighbors*.'

It's tempting, isn't it? Just to pick people who are easy to get along with, and easy to love? People like ourselves...

Contrast that with the parable, where the Samaritan goes to the aid of a man he doesn't know at all. When he goes to help, there's no discussion to find out whether the beaten man deserves to be helped, or whether they have anything in common. The Samaritan doesn't find out his race or religion before offering help. All that matters is that the man is half dead and naked on the road, and in need of help.

In v33, the Samaritan SEES him, and TAKES PITY on him.

And I think we can all take something out of this part of the story. Jesus is reminding us that we shouldn't just love those who are easy to love. God wants us to have a heart for our other '*neighbors*' regardless of what they are like.

And we'll often have neighbors who are hard to love.

G.K. Cheserton once said:

We make our friends, and we make our enemies, but God makes our next-door neighbor.

And it's true. At the end of the day, we have very little control over who lives next door to us in our street. Or who sits next to us in our office. Or who sits next to our kids in their classrooms. You can't control who sits next to you on an airplane, or in the waiting room at the doctor's surgery. But they're all neighbors of sorts. Neighbors that God puts in your way.

And do you know what, many of them won't have ever met a Christian, except for you. Imagine if you were the one Christian '*neighbor*' they ever met. Don't you want to be remembered like the Samaritan, as loving regardless of differences? And like Jesus, full of mercy for people even when they didn't treat him well. What a great witness that could be for Jesus if we were all full of love for our neighbors like that.

So those are our *near* neighbors, the ones we come into personal contact with.

Now I want us to think a bit wider, to our neighbors further away.

Loving our enemies

Me, I can't read this story without thinking of the neighbors who live not far from us, neighbors who we see on the streets of Napa, and the streets of San Francisco, and the streets of every major city in the US.

And what speaks to me out of this parable is the kind of love that the Samaritan showed for the stranger. Love where he stops what he's doing, love where he steps into someone else's world to help them, love where he shares even his own money to look after a fellow human being who is suffering.

As we Surely Jesus is asking us, how will we respond? Will we really love our neighbor?

We don't want to end up like the priest and the Levite, with a religious veneer but no love... Jesus wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves. And that starts by putting ourselves in the other person's shoes.

Speaking on this passage, Martin Luther King Jr said:

The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me.

But the Good Samaritan reversed the question: If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?

Brothers and sisters, I look forward to conversations where we think about how we can offer effective help to those in our community affected by homelessness, poverty and addiction. I would love to see us take a role in partnering with local agencies who are set up to provide the kind of support that makes a long term difference in people's lives. I'd love to see some of us offering our time and expertise and financial resources to love our neighbors in the name of Christ.

Because again, it would be so amazing for Jesus' church to lead the way in welcoming strangers with the same sort of love that God welcomed us with. It's the same love that God promotes throughout the Scriptures – love for the weak and vulnerable, love for the widow and orphan, love for the refugee and the stranger. Love even for our enemies.

Because it's when the church loves like this, that we show the world what God is like. When our actions match our words, we show that God can really make a difference. And when we give sacrificially and at great cost, we point the world to the cross, where Jesus gave up everything to cure us of our deepest problem – sin. Where he put us first, even though it would cost him his life. When Jesus said: If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him...

Brothers and sisters, who is your neighbor? And how will you love them?

