

Date: July 13, 2025 (Pentecost 5)

1. Texts: Amos 7:7-17; Ps. 82; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: neighbourliness essential to discipleship.
4. Aim: challenge current suppositions.
5. Proposition: "Jesus doesn't define the neighbour. He provides the model for being the neighbour."

BEING THE NEIGHBOUR¹

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus once said,
But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good
to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those
who mistreat you.²

With this, he laid the foundation for the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

We all know this parable. In fact, we know it so well that it cannot have the impact it would have had when Jesus first told it. Actually, we don't have to have the relationship between Samaritans and Jews explained. We don't have to have the avoidance of the priest and the Levite explained. We've heard it all dozens of times before. We all know this parable.

What we maybe don't catch when reading this parable, is that Jesus turned the question of the lawyer on its head. The lawyer asked, "And who is my neighbor?" It's a question directed outward. The lawyer wants to put limits on those he is commanded by God to love, you know, as in "love your neighbour as yourself". Jesus' answer turned the question inward. Jesus answered the limiting question with an unlimited answer: *"You be the neighbour. You put into your actions what I preached during the Sermon on the Mount."*

So, we are confronted with a divine demand to be the love which God commands us to have for others. We cannot look at others and ask, "Do they deserve my care and compassion?" Instead, we are to look at all others and ask, "How can I be their neighbour who loves them in word and deed as the Samaritan did?" The real question is not the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbour?".

¹ Working Preacher is an excellent site for background to writing sermons. Copy and paste this into your browser: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-15-3/commentary-on-luke-1025-37-6>. I have Working Preacher bookmarked in my browser: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/>.

² Luke 6:27-28.

The real question is, “How can I be the neighbour?” Not “who” but “how”. Not directed outwards, but aimed inwardly. What must I do to be the neighbour God calls me to be?

It is important to refine the sense of “call”. God is indeed calling each of us to be the neighbour to all. But the call of God does not exceed our ability to answer the call. God is not calling us to do things we cannot do. Yes, he is certainly calling us to sacrificial love in word and deed. But our sacrifices are not to hurt or burden others. Yes, we do what we can with the Ukrainian or Gazan support agencies, but we do not put our own family at risk to do so. We do feed the hungry and clothe the naked without making our own family hungry or in need of clothing. We love sacrificially in ways that we can sense and know are real, without sacrificing other people.

So it is with God’s call. His call may stretch our capacity to love, but his call does not hurt others through our own sacrifices.

It is most effective, if we direct our attention to the circumstances around us. It is clearest, when we ask ourselves, “To whom will I be the neighbour today? For whom will I be the Good Samaritan today?” Of course, these questions are open-ended and non-limiting. According to Jesus, there are no boundaries to these questions. After all, the Samaritan in the story was supposed to be the bad guy, the enemy to the Jew. Despite that truth, the Samaritan was the good neighbour who proved his love even for Jews. So, we ask, “To whom will I be the neighbour today?”, looking for anyone in need of God.

It would be best if we used our resources intelligently. If I have X amount of spiritual and emotional energy I can spend on being neighbourly, I should make choices based on the likely impact of a neighbour’s love. If I have Y dollars available for ministry, I should make choices based on the need and the effectiveness of my sacrifices. We can’t save the world—that’s up to God. We can only be the neighbour, God calls us to be. We make wise choices for the sake of God and for the sake of his call to be neighbours.

Related to this, it is likely best if we direct our attention and resources beyond our own parishioners. This is a little awkward, because many people will think, we should help our own first. But that's precisely the failure of the priest and the Levite in the parable. They didn't help their own first. And the Samaritan helped his cultural enemy. Our proclamation of the gospel is more needed beyond our congregation. And it can be more effective beyond our congregation.

Jesus said,

But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you.

The Samaritan proved what it was to be a neighbour and so to fulfill Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Our question today is not, "Who is my neighbour?" Our question is, "For whom will I be the neighbour?" I pray we can ask this question every day. I pray that each of us will be a neighbour in word and deed for the sake of Jesus and his gospel.

AMEN.