

Week of Prayer

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PURPOSE: In this lesson, we will reflect on what this parable teaches us about neighborliness and pray for God's guidance and leading to love neighbors.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 10:25-37

PREPARATION Needed: Have Bibles available for those who need one, and assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother. If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR? A GOOD SAMARITAN REFLECTION

Luke 10:25-37, King James Version

“25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

A more modern version: Luke 10:25-37, Christian Standard Bible

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

“25 Then an expert in the law stood up to test him, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the law?” he asked him. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,**” and “**your neighbor as yourself.**”

28 “You’ve answered correctly,” he told him. “Do this and you will live.”

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

30 Jesus took up the question and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion. 34 He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him. When I come back I’ll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.’

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

37 “The one who showed mercy to him,” he said.

Then Jesus told him, “Go and do the same.”

Now, let’s read the Scripture again, with a different translation:

Luke 10:25-37, Hawai‘i Pidgin

“Da Good Guy From Samaria

25 One teacha dat teach God’s Rules wen stand up fo aks Jesus one question fo trick him. He say, “Teacha, wat I gotta do fo get da real kine life dat stay to da max foeva?”

26 Jesus say, “Tell me, wat God’s Rules say inside da Bible?”

27 He say, “Get love an aloha fo da Boss yoa God wit all yoa heart, an wit everyting inside you, an wit how you tink, an wit all yoa power. An get love an aloha fo everybody jalike you get love fo yoaself.”

28 Jesus say, “Dass right! Do dat an you goin live fo real kine.”

29 But da guy like make himself look good, so he aks, “Wat you mean, love an aloha fo everybody?”

30 Jesus say, “Had one guy. He wen go Jericho town from Jerusalem. Den had some guys dat wen jump him, rip him off, bus him up, an leave him dea fo mahke. 31 Bumbye one Jewish priest guy come dat same road. He spock da guy, an go da odda side. 32 Same ting, one guy from da Levi ohana dat help da prieses, he spock him, an go da odda side too. 33 Den one guy from Samaria going dat road wen come wea da guy stay, spock him, an get pity fo him. 34 He go by him, put olive oil an wine on top his cuts, an wrap um up. He put da guy on top his own donkey, an bring him by da hotel, an take care him. 35 Da nex day he take out two silva coins an give um to da boss fo da hotel, an say, ‘Take care him, an wen I come back I give you wateva you wen pay.’

36 “Now, wat you tink? From da three guys dat wen pass, who wen get mo love an aloha fo da guy dose guys wen bus up?”

37 Da teacha guy say, “Da guy dat wen show pity fo him.”
Jesus say, “Go, make lidat.””

I was drawn to this translation. How many times do we speak “Christian” or quote/read Scripture in a way that so many do not understand? Are we reaching out to our neighbors in a way that we are understood?

On one of our short-term mission trips, one of the youths frustratingly announced, “Why can’t they just speak English!” I have heard this comment in the US, as many of you have. When sharing Jesus with our neighbor, do we speak a language that they can understand? Are we speaking a “language” that only Christians understand?

Who doesn’t love the story of the Good Samaritan? Jesus tells a parable in Luke 10 that demonstrates Israel’s failure in this area. The parable is about a man who is robbed, beaten and left for dead. In this story, two men come upon this victim: a priest and a Levite. Both men saw the man in distress but went out of their way to avoid him. It is important to note that these men were identified as religious leaders. Then Jesus introduces another person into this story. The third person was identified as a Samaritan. This is very important. The Jewish people viewed Samaritans as half-breeds, both physically and spiritually. Samaritans and Jews practiced open hostility toward each other, yet Jesus intentionally makes the hero of the story a Samaritan. The hated Samaritan took pity on the injured man. He went to him. He bandaged his wounds. Then, he transported him to an inn where he could be cared for. To top it all off, he paid for this man’s care out of his pocket. Jesus is teaching that love and mercy know no national boundaries. But he is also showing that prejudice is wrong. This parable was told in response to a question from a lawyer who was trying to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against him. Jesus jumped right into the trap and turned it into an opportunity to teach a very important lesson.

In the Gospel of John, the religious leaders would accuse Jesus of being a “demon-possessed Samaritan.” This false accusation would be used to try and discredit everything Jesus said and did. This demonstrates the hatred they had for all Samaritans and Jesus. How would you have felt if you were a Samaritan man or woman in the temple courts that day?

We are living in a world that is about to explode. At the heart of this crisis is the inability to see people the way God sees them and the inability to love people the way God loves them. I see this as an opportunity for the church to rise and demonstrate God’s love to those who feel marginalized in our society. You see, right now we have a choice. We can choose to be the priest or the Levite in Jesus’ story. Or we can choose to be the Samaritan who demonstrated love and mercy!

I am thinking of Fred Rogers.

Mr. Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister. Then, he followed Christ into the neighborhood and television and the hearts of children and adults alike. Fred had a vision that his television program could teach children about love, goodness and the dignity of every human being. It was not just words. The people in his neighborhood and the actors he included in the series manifested diversity, including gender, racial and sexuality. Fred Rogers believed that cultural diversity and differences are to be celebrated.

Fred Rogers embodied what it meant to be a neighbor rising above prejudice and hostility. “Won’t you be my neighbor?” he sang; asking and living that question is the good news in action. It is our highest calling. What neighbors, “others,” may fear and hate, ignore and exclude is ours to accept and include, celebrate and bless. I often wish that Mr. Rogers was still alive to help us sing his song. “It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood. It’s a beautiful day for a neighbor. Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Since we’re together we might as well say, please, won’t you be my neighbor?”

Now it is up to us to sing and live that song. How do we sing the song of Mr. Rogers who sang the song of Jesus? By speaking up when in the presence of racist or sexist jokes or bullying. By making efforts to reach out to those of different races, religions, economic classes and cultures. By learning how to proclaim and defend the rights and freedoms of all people. And, most subversive, perhaps reaching out to those of different political parties. These days, that’s a tough one for me.

Mr. Rogers built an entire TV show, for over three decades, on one simple question: Won’t you be my neighbor? It doesn’t matter how much money you have. It doesn’t matter what language you speak. It doesn’t matter what color your skin is. If you’re present, you’re invited. Won’t you be my neighbor?

“Won’t you be my neighbor?” That’s one of my hopes. I hope that our church starts to look a little bit more like Mr. Rogers’ neighborhood. I hope that you would get here a little bit earlier and hang out a little bit longer. Maybe you just spend 15 minutes hanging out and talking with people a little bit. I hope that you’d open your house, or your condo, or your apartment to somebody you don’t know that well. That you’d invite them into your space, your life, a little bit. I hope that if you’re lonely, you start to find friendships. My hope is if you feel unloved, you start to feel somebody’s arms wrapping around you. My hope is if you’re a cynic, you start to say, “If Jesus-people are like this, I might want to explore more.” I hope that we’d look a little bit more like Mr. Rogers’ neighborhood.

You may have noticed that we live in a cultural moment that’s as divided as it’s ever been. You don’t have to look too far to find ways that you differ from the people around you, whether it’s religiously, politically or ethnically. There are several ways we can choose to draw our lines in the sand and define ourselves by what we are or by what we aren’t. I just want to propose an idea to you. I think that’s a tired way of living. I think Jesus has more for us. In a moment where 46% of Americans report feeling lonely, maybe God is calling the church to be part of that healing balm that says we have room for you around our table, in our homes and in our lives. What if God wants to use us to breathe a little bit of hope? Won’t you be my neighbor?

Here’s a word that’s the opposite of hospitality: xenophobia. That means fear of the stranger. Fear of the one who doesn’t look like me, whom I have a few questions about. We have a few disagreements. Fear of them. Did you know that you cannot be afraid of your neighbor and love your neighbor at the same time? What Jesus is calling us to is a fundamental attitude toward the other that says we have room in our hearts and our lives for you ... exactly the way that you are. We don’t offer hospitality to change people, but we create space where they can change.

Imagine going to the gym ready to work out and the trainer says, “Welcome, we’re so glad that you’re here because health and fitness are all that matter at the end of the day. This workout is going to be amazing. This is going to be great! You’re going to get ripped. You’re going to get shredded. It’s going to be unreal! Have a great day! God bless you!” But then he walks right out without training you at all.

You go the next day, and the trainer says, “All right! We’re going to work the legs today. We want to be equally yoked up top and bottom. Right? We’re going to get after it. It’s going to be amazing! You’re going to do great! You’re going to do wonders! You’re going to be a beautiful person when we’re done with this! Goodbye! God bless you! Have a wonderful day!”

Does church ever feel like that? You get pumped up, but then no action occurs. Most followers of Jesus think praying for their enemies is a great idea; very few of them do it. Most followers of Jesus think being a neighbor is a great idea. I think very few of us do it.

It's easy to have figurative love for imaginative neighbors, but that isn't what Jesus is calling us to do. Look at the way the Good Samaritan lives this out. He *saw* the man. He *went* to him. He *bandaged* him and poured wine and oil on his wounds. He *put him* on his donkey. He *brought him* to an inn and took care of him. He returned to check on him. This is real love for a real neighbor. One of the ways you can know if you're offering real love to a real neighbor is whether it costs you anything. The Scriptures say we know what love is because Jesus laid down his life for us. It cost him something and therefore we should lay down our lives for others as well.

If you're looking for something to do this week, can I encourage you? Turn your bulletin over and draw a tic-tac-toe board on the back of it. Write "me" in the middle of it. I'd love for you to spend some time and think through man, who are my neighbors? Real names. And see how many of these boxes of people live around you. If you live in an apartment, you're looking at a cube. Who are your neighbors? Real names. Not ... "I think that guy's name is Bobby; he could be Bobby; he should be Bobby." No! Real names. Ten percent of people can do this, fill out every box. Only 10 percent. If you're part of the 90% like me, no guilt, no shame, but what I'd love for you to do is say, "Jesus, which one of these houses might you want me to get to know a little bit?" You might have to eat some crow. You may have to go up to them and say "hey, we've been neighbors for the last five years. I've asked you your name before, but I don't remember what it is. What's your name?" That's a hard conversation. I know because I had it. But it's important. Real love for a real neighbor demand that we know their names.

Here's a question for you. Why do you think Jesus picked a Samaritan as the star of his story? If Jesus's only point in the story of the Good Samaritan is "you should love your neighbor," he doesn't need the Samaritan to be the star of the story, does he? It could be a Jewish layperson, it could be anybody, but he picks a hated person as the protagonist of his story. Why does he do that? I think he wants to suggest to you and me that the us verses them divide is trite, is tired and should be done away with. Us verses them is no way to live. Drawing a line in the sand and saying, "We're against you because of X," is NOT the way of Jesus. Why does he pick a Samaritan? Because he wants us to realize that **kingdom allegiance** is greater than **tribal adherence** and just going along with the party line. The divisions that keep us apart. Well, I'm progressive. I'm conservative. I'm a Republican. I'm a Democrat. I'm an American; you're not. I'm a Christian; you're not.

So, he decides to make the Samaritan the star of the story. The Samaritan is the one who is becoming neighborly. The Samaritans are the ones who are living in the way of Jesus. You wonder if he sort of stood back and went, “Ha! Ha! Take that!”

Two things for you, first, you do not have to agree with people to love them. Does God love you? I believe that with every fiber of my being - God loves you. Does God agree with you in every way? Probably not! And, we don't all agree with each other, so God can't agree with ALL of us, right? He loves you, but he doesn't necessarily agree with you. You don't need to agree with people to love them. We have got to get this right, you guys! I believe that followers of Jesus are getting run over in our cultural moment because we've lost sight of this.

Here's the second thing: You do not need to agree with people to treat them with dignity, value and kindness, and to recognize the image of God within them. You don't need to. You don't need to agree with them to do that! I don't know about you, but I want to be part of a church that says, “Won't you be my neighbor?” We have all sorts of differences. We have things we don't agree on, but maybe it's not anything that they just HEAR while they're here. Maybe it's like me watching Mr. Rogers; I don't remember ONE episode! You may not remember one sermon, but I hope you remember the way that you feel when you're here. I hope the way that you feel is man, there's something about these people ... they care for me, they love me, they're for me, they're going to be with me in the hills and the valleys.

So, Jesus looks at this man and asks “which do you think was the neighbor?” The man says it was the one who had mercy, the one who had compassion, the one whose insides turned when they saw this man and he did something about it. He acted on it. That's the neighborly guy. He can't even say the name ‘Samaritan.’ Jesus responds with this simple, mic drop moment ... wonderful, go and do likewise. You should do that! You should become that kind of person ... where your religion doesn't keep you from loving. Where **mercy** is greater than **religiosity**. If it was in fact, I'll be ceremonially unclean if I touch that dead body. If it was the fact man, if this guy's Jewish, I need to help him, if he's not then who cares. What Jesus says is no, no, no, no, mercy triumphs over religion. It's not just about what we can do to appease God, it's about actually living in the way of Jesus. That's what he is inviting us to do.

If your religion prevents you from loving, it's not from Jesus. Read through the Gospels. Look at every time Jesus heals on the Sabbath. Could he have healed on Sunday, the next day? Sure! He could have. Why does he do that? Because he wants to break down the systems that oppress people instead of lifting people. That robs people's life rather than the

things that bring people life. Throughout Jesus's ministry, he's chipping away at religiosity and saying mercy is BETTER than religion.

So, the question isn't "Who's my neighbor?" The question is: Am I becoming neighborly? That's where Jesus wants to lead us. What if you started with the conviction that Jesus has me exactly where he wants me for a reason. What if you didn't just by happenstance choose the house that you're in, the apartment that you're in, the condo that you're in? What if Jesus has a reason for your being in that very place and his reason is that you may be a conduit of his grace, of his mercy and his love to strangers that he might invite you or call you to open your life to? So, in a world full of divisions and fissures and fractures, I just want to end by saying one thing ... love your neighbor. Love your rich neighbor; love your poor neighbor. Love your gay neighbor; love your straight neighbor. Love your dirty neighbor; love your clean neighbor. Love your loud neighbor; love your quiet neighbor. Love the neighbor you like; love the neighbor you don't like. Love your neighbor PERIOD. And just like he did, throughout the first, second and third centuries, I think Jesus might just use his church to transform the world.

I want to end by giving you just a few practices and then I'm going to lead us in an imaginative prayer exercise to end. I think we need some handles for this message so it's not just an idea. Here are a few things you could do this week: I would encourage you to fill out that Block Map (tic-tac-toe). No guilt. No shame. Just fill it out honestly and start praying over it. Maybe this week you start prayer walking around your neighborhood. As you do so, just introduce yourself to people. Say hi! to them, get to know them a little bit. Make that a part of your practice. It's good for your health, it's good for your witness. It's good for everything. I'd encourage you to download the nextdoor app. You'll get connected with a bunch of people in your community if you're not already. You'll find out things that are going on. I found out things that were going on in my neighborhood that I celebrate, that are awesome, that are great. Maybe you open your house and have people over for dinner, for lunch, whatever. What might Jesus do to say to you, "Come on? Come a little bit deeper. What does it look like to become a neighbor?"

I just want to invite you to spend a moment asking Jesus what he wants us to do with that. How does he want us to live this out?

Let me invite you into the story. There are already people in your life for whom you can make space. This may be hard. There may be some unspoken things between you and these people. Maybe some of these images may resonate. Scroll through photos. Maybe sporting alliances. Maybe that house that seems to have everything ... or the people that live down the road ... in a tent. Maybe the barrier is political; your perspectives are

different and it's hard to understand them. Maybe it's those people you feel justified to feel against. God has created so many people... all that he's placed his image upon. There is someone in your life that Jesus may be inviting you to be a neighbor to today. Or this week. Or this month. So, take a moment and ask Jesus, quietly within your heart, to reveal a face, someone to whom you can be merciful.

Jesus turns once more to you and says, "Remember the story of the Samaritan. Go and do likewise." Amen.

Jesus, we want to become people who genuinely, in real ways, love the people that you've divinely placed around us. Give us your heart, we pray, give us your mind. Lord, as we step out in practice this week, would we see you move in both our hearts and the lives of the people around us, we pray. In Jesus' name. And all God's people said ... Amen.

Consider these questions:

How do you usually react to injustice? What character would you be if Jesus put you in his story? Have you ever said or thought something that wasn't true about someone? Why is Solomon's warning about prejudice (partiality) relevant to our time?

Points for prayer

- Don't allow yourself to be influenced by religious ideologies. Allow the Holy Spirit to empower you to see everyone in the same way he does.
- Let God slow you down so that you don't miss seeing those who are in need.
- Become a source of encouragement for those in need by showing and demonstrating God's love and mercy.
- Throughout the church, pray that prejudice, partiality and racism will be overcome.

Suggested Prayer:

God, I'm sorry for how bad things have gotten and how deep my personal fall has gone. My thoughts, words and actions have offended you and hurt others. There are a lot of grieving people right now and with good reason. Many people do not see anything wrong with what is happening. Thank you for your mercy, grace and kindness. I pray that your church comes alongside those who are grieving and mourns with them. I pray that you will give each of us the opportunity to share life everlasting with those who don't know you yet. Please allow us to bind up the brokenhearted and free the captives. Please make me and your church like Paul, who was all things to all people. In the name of Jesus Christ, I ask. Amen.

Shared by: Pat Havener lives in Seffner, Florida with her very patient husband of 49 years. Gary pastors the Seffner Community Advent Christian Church. Pat enjoys gardening, herbs and their cats Priscilla and Pete, especially Pete, who at 30 pounds needs a diet. She is a proud grandmother to seven grandchildren. Pat directs the church children's programs and serves as her local and national WHFMS Spiritual Life Chairman. Pat is taking time away from volunteering for the Children's Heart Program of Samaritan's Purse but continues to train medical folks in women's and children's health in Honduras. She is a Certified RN Clinician, specializing in STDs, Women's health and pediatrics.