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Luke 10:25-37 – *Intentionally Connecting with Our Neighbours*

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On 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?”

²⁷ He 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.”

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

³⁰ In 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. 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. 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, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The 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?”

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

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Last May, we went out into our neighborhood as a church.

A group of 40 of us went door to door—

Not for the purpose of evangelism—

But to check in with our neighbors to see where they were at:

“What do you like about living in this neighborhood?”

“What are some of the struggles you face living here?”

“How could a church make this a better place?”

We found that one theme in particular kept coming up:

Connection.

People don't feel connected with their neighbors.

They go off to work...

Only to come home and live life alone.

And doesn't this make sense...

That lack of connection would be one of the biggest struggles?

After all, we were *designed* to live in community...

We were *made* to live life with others...

Not to go through life alone.

We were created by our triune God:

One God, but three persons—

Father, Son and Holy Spirit—

Who have been enjoying each other's fellowship from eternity...

Never alone.

Existing together, creating together, sustaining the universe together, saving humanity together, and preparing for the re-creation of all things together.

Never alone...

Always connected in community.

Of course our neighbors would feel the struggle of being disconnected...

It goes against the grain of creation.

Disconnection hits them at a deeper level too...

A level they're probably not even aware of.

For many of our neighbors, they are also disconnected from God.

They have not experienced fullness of life...

Because they do not have a relationship with the Lord life.

They remain estranged from their creator, sustainer, and savior...

They are disconnected from Jesus Christ...

In whom is found salvation.

This morning we're looking at this familiar parable—

The Parable of the Good Samaritan—

And we'll be looking at it on two different levels...

To see what it says to us about intentionally connecting with our neighbors.

First, at a surface level...

The reading we're probably most familiar with.

Second, at a deeper level...

We'll take the parable in its full context and see what it has to say.

Let's start with the parable itself...

It begins with this question:

“Who is my neighbor?”

This question is asked by the expert in the law to Jesus...

And it's is a question of limits.

Back in 1st century Israel...

There was a social order to maintain.

Different groups of people were expected to interact in different ways:

Priests were supposed to keep boundaries that separated them from anyone that would make them unclean;

There were rules and regulations for men and women...

How they were supposed to interact with each other;

Jews treated Gentiles (non-Jews) differently than they did fellow Jews.

Limits helped to maintain the way the society was structured.

The lawyer's question is one of limits:

“Who counts as my neighbor?”

“Who am I expected to love?”

Because surely it has limits.

Jesus answers this man’s question with a question of his own...

But he introduces his question with a story:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho...”

“And this man fell into the hands of robbers.”

We don’t know who this man is...

All we know is that this generic man is traveling a dangerous road...

Descending some 1,000m...

Passing through narrow points on this journey that is notorious for robbers to hide.

This man is attacked—

Stripped of any clothes or accessories that would identify his social status—

He’s beaten and left half dead.

As chance would have it...

A priest is walking this lonely road and sees the half-dead man.

Now, we don’t know the reason, but the priest passes by on the other side of the road.

Maybe he is concerned with staying ceremonially clean...

Recognizing that contact with this man might defile him...

Making him unfit to do his job for a while.

Maybe the priest has just finished some of his duties in Jerusalem...

And is returning to Jericho where his family/house is...

He’s in a hurry to be done with work and doesn’t want to give his time away.

Maybe the priest saw the man laying there and thought it was a trap...

And he didn’t want to fall victim to any attackers.

We’re not given a reason...

But the important thing is that he sees this man in desperate need...

And doesn't stop to help...

The priest avoids the man in need.

The same goes for the second passer-by...

A Levite...

A descendent from the tribe of Levi who was a temple worker.

Levites assisted priests with their duties and helped police the temple.

Again, we don't know his motives...

But we know that the Levite saw this stripped, bloody man...

And he too passed by on the other side.

The people listening to Jesus' parable would have known what was coming...

2 who didn't get it right...

And then 1 who did.

The first two are clerical figures—

Priest and Levite...workers in the temple—

They didn't stop.

Now Jesus would tell them that a Jew, an ordinary Israelite, was walking down the same road...

He would see the man and surely stop to help...

An ordinary Jew would be the hero of the story. (Alan Culpepper)

Instead, Jesus says, "a Samaritan comes along..."

The jaws of all of his listeners drop.

"A Samaritan?"

"You mean a half-breed?"

These 2 groups were bitter enemies...Jews and Samaritans.

During the time of the Divided Kingdom back in the OT...

The Northern Kingdom of Israel, Samaria, was attacked by the Assyrians.

The leading Jewish citizens of Samaria were sent out...

And non-Jewish people were brought in.

There was intermarriage between the left-over Jews and new outsiders...

Which the Southern Kingdom, Judea, opposed.

As a result, there were hundreds of years of bitter animosity between the two groups.

When the exiles came back from Babylon and start to rebuild the temple...

The Samaritans offer to help...

But the Jews reject their offer.

So the Samaritans try to stop the rebuilding of the temple. (Stein)

When the Samaritans build their own temple on Mount Gerizim...

The Jews destroy it.

These are bitter enemies.

So Jesus' unexpected turn in this parable would have caused quite the shock.

The Samaritan comes upon this man on the road—

Sees his blood and his wounds—

And has pity on him.

The Samaritan plays the role of hero:

Pouring oil and wine on the wounds for comfort and healing before bandaging them;

Lifting the man onto his own animal...

Taking him to the local hotel.

The Samaritan takes care of the man at the hotel—

Caring for him through the night—

And when he leaves the next day, he makes sure the man is still watched over...

Setting plans to return and check on him.

This is the story Jesus tells before asking his question.

The expert in the law asked:

“Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus tells the story and could have answered:

“*This* is your neighbor.”

“The guy in the ditch.”

But he doesn’t do that.

He shifts the emphasis back onto the expert in the law...

Asking a slightly different question:

“Which of these three was a neighbor *to* the man?”

Nevermind the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

The question really is, “Are YOU a neighbor?”

The goal isn’t to scan the area and ask “Who of these should I love?”

“According to my religious views...”

“According to my ethnicity...”

“According to the laws (written and unwritten) of society...”

“Who do I have an obligation to?”

The goal is to be a neighbor to anyone and everyone in our path.

It’s not, “Who is my neighbor?”

But, “Am *I* a neighbor?”

So what can we take away from this?

For us this parable says that everyone whose path we cross is our neighbor.

It doesn’t matter if they’re young or old.

It doesn’t matter if they’re Muslim or Agnostic...

It doesn’t matter if they are anti-Christian or Atheist.

There are no boundaries or limits when it comes to our neighbor...

Because it’s not about them...

It’s about us...

And our obligation to be a neighbor.

What are we doing to love the people in our path?

No matter who they may be...

Friend, enemy, or stranger.

Next, what we see is that being a neighbor requires action.

Look at all of the verbs in the parable:

Went to the man;

Bandaged his wounds;

Poured oil and wine;

Put the man on his donkey;

Brought him to the inn;

And *took care of* him.

These are all actions that the Samaritan takes to meet the man's needs.

He doesn't do this for himself...

There's nothing in it for his personal gain...

In fact, he makes a lot of sacrifices attending to this man:

Putting himself at risk of attack;

Using his own oil and wine;

Having to walk the rest of the journey while the man rides his donkey;

And paying who knows how much to sustain this man after he leaves.

Being a neighbor means action.

It means going to those in our path...

And taking the actions to love them.

What does this look like for a church?

There are many ways love could express itself...

But here's one creative way:

(Thanks to Pastor Rich for pointing this story out to me)

From the Pastors of the CRC FB page:

My brother is a school teacher in a heavily dominated gang and poverty-stricken area in Sauk Village, IL. Half his class has a parent or sibling in jail. The falling tax base makes it near impossible to keep up with maintenance and student needs. The last number of weeks, 250 volunteers from Faith Church in Dyer, IN (5 min drive) adopted his school - painted walls & added murals. They challenged the staff for an out of the box wish list. Requesting one set - the church purchased and installed two washers/dryers and provided all the detergent for students coming to school in the same dirty clothes. They also scheduled a volunteer to run the laundry and provide alternative clothing.

This church saw a need...

They had compassion...

And they took the action to love their neighbor.

That's what we see at the first level of reading this passage...

There are no limits on our call to love...

If they cross our path, we ask:

“How can I be a neighbor?”

And loving our neighbor means action...

Which usually means sacrifice.

With the rest of our time, let's get a little deeper.

The question asked by this expert in the law was originally:

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Essentially he's asking, “How can I be saved?”

Knowing that it's this man's job to know the Scriptures, Jesus responds:

“How do you read the Law?”

The man quotes 2 passages from the Torah:

From Deut 6 he says, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”

And from Lev 19, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

“You're right,” Jesus says...

“Do this and you will live.”

Do you feel the weight of these commands?

If we don't, maybe we don't understand them.

Love God with everything you have;

Love him with all of your being;

Devote all of your life to him.

If you ever put anything before God—

Money, sex, food, power, sports, video games, family, work, reputation—

You're not fulfilling this command.

If there are any areas in your life where you haven't given God complete control...

You're not fulfilling this command.

If you use your talents, gifts and resources for your own gain and not to give God glory...

You're not fulfilling this command.

How about love your neighbor as you love yourself?

How do you love yourself?

You make sure your stomach's full;

You make sure you're well-clothed;

You make sure you're safe.

Are we doing this for others?

Jesus takes this seriously...

It's not optional.

Think about the story of the sheep and the goats from Matthew 25:

Sheep on his right and goats on his left.

The sheep are pointed to eternal life because:

They clothed the naked;

Fed the hungry;

Invited in the stranger;

And cared for the sick—

Those who don't do this—

The goats—
 Are led away to eternal punishment.
 Feel the weight of these 2 commands.
 The expert in the law feels the weight—
 He knows how much is being asked of him—
 And that's why he tries to justify himself.
 He tries to set a limit on who his neighbor is.
 The commands are so involved and all-encompassing...
 That this religious leader knows he cannot keep them.

This is the position we're all in.
 The way to eternal life is to love the Lord our God with everything we have...
 To obey him and follow him with all of our lives.
 And to love our neighbors...
 To go above and beyond to meet their needs.
 Jesus says, "This is how you have eternal life."
 But who here can do that?
 No one.
 All of us...
 Those who have been Christians for decades—
 Our neighbors who don't know the Lord—
 All of us come up short when it comes to these commands that lead us to eternal life.
 There is nothing that we can DO to earn/merit eternal life for ourselves...
 Because we are all guilty of sinning against God and our neighbors.

Luke is using this parable in part, though, to point to Jesus as the Ultimate Good Samaritan. (DA Carson)

Think about it...
 Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem...

He is traveling toward the cross.

And what does his work on the cross do? (DA Carson gives these)

It saves us from death...

Just like the Samaritan did for the man beaten and left half-dead.

By the cross we are healed...

Oil and wine have been poured into our wounds...

Christ by his blood has healed our deep wounds of sin and guilt.

Jesus has paid it all for us...

His perfect life of obedience and his death on the cross are made ours...

As if we lived and died his life.

The debt that we owed was paid by Jesus.

And finally he guarantees that we're not slaves.

The man who was beaten and left half-dead was taken to the inn.

We don't know how long he required care...

3 weeks, 4 weeks, 5 weeks.

Think of the payment he would have racked up.

Everything he had was taken from him...

So if he couldn't pay the innkeeper...

By law he would become his slave.

The Samaritan promises to pay for this man's care...

Assuring that he doesn't fall into slavery.

In Christ we are set free from the bondage to sin...

We are no longer under obligation to serve Satan.

At the deepest level, this story in Luke is pointing to our need for a Savior.

The expert in the law cannot earn it himself...

We cannot earn it ourselves...

And our neighbors cannot earn it.

So we intentionally connect with our neighbors...

Meeting their needs...

Taking the actions of love...

And carrying with us the life-saving message of Jesus Christ.

How can we do this?

You can plug into a group that is already working toward this.

Mosaic Centre.

Community Corner.

Both of these programs started with people recognizing a need.

They saw a need and took action.

And now, slowly, the love and message of Christ is working its way into peoples' lives.

Or you can look at the people who cross your path everyday:

At work;

At school;

Your physical neighbors;

What can you do to be a neighbor to them?

What action can you take to love them.

Intentionally connecting with our neighbours for the glory of God.

May God give us all of the strength and wisdom we need.

Amen.