

8.14.22 – Pentecost 10
“Am I a Good Neighbor?”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Leviticus 19:9-18 (NIV) ~ Pam

- ⁹ “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.
- ¹¹ “Do not steal.
“Do not lie.
“Do not deceive one another.
- ¹² “Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.
- ¹³ “Do not defraud or rob your neighbor.
“Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.
- ¹⁴ “Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord.
- ¹⁵ “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.
- ¹⁶ “Do not go about spreading slander among your people.
“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the Lord.
- ¹⁷ “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.
- ¹⁸ “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

L: These are the Holy Words of God. C: Thanks be to God!

Luke 10:29-37 (GNT) ~ Pam

- ²⁹ But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?”
- ³⁰ Jesus answered, “There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. ³¹ It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. ³² In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. ³⁴ He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Take care of him,’ he told the innkeeper, ‘and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.’”
- ³⁶ And Jesus concluded, “In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man attacked by the robbers?”
- ³⁷ The teacher of the Law answered, “The one who was kind to him.”

Jesus replied, “You go, then, and do the same.”

Leader: These are the Convicting Words of Jesus. **People: Thanks be to God!**

Please pray with me:

Merciful God, we hear these words and feel inadequate to be the good neighbor. Thank you for our time together to be encouraged and convicted to action. This familiar parable of Jesus has provoked our consciences and brought us closer to you. Humble us Lord so that we may be less arrogant and more hospitable to others. Let us hear your message of invitation, listening for your direction as the Holy Spirit leads us personally and as a church. Now speak through this messenger and give us ears to hear. Amen.

Thank you to all who made yesterday’s service for Agnes Lewis a success: those who greeted, helped with transportation, set up, clean up, food, and music. I hope you were as blessed as I was, even in our grief. Let us remember that being there for her family was indeed a show of mercy, care, and hospitality ministries. 11 of us also had a wonderful time in Thurmont, MD on Tuesday. Thank you to our drivers and organizers!

The last few weeks were “Kingdom of God” parables, but this week’s is more a “Kingdom on Earth” parable. There are many characters in this story, so first, let’s imagine that we are the one who had been beaten and robbed. You’re lying helpless on the side of the road, fearful, injured, and in pain. How does that feel? You cannot do anything to help yourself – independence and mobility are gone. I would pray for help. How would you react when you see a priest coming? Hopeful? Or then angry that he did not stop to aid you in your plight. Then you see a Levite actually cross over to the other side to avoid you. None of us has ever done that, right? I’m teasing you; it happens more often than we’d like to admit – it is human nature to avoid someone you don’t want to see or help. Sometimes we avoid the vulnerable because they are like a mirror to

us, making us feel vulnerable as well. Jesus does not say much about how grateful the man was, but we can assume so.

Who are the other characters? Let's imagine that you are the **priest**, a Jewish religious leader. Remember that our victim was Jewish too. Did that make a difference? It is hard to understand why the priest crosses to the other side, but in today's world, such a person avoids needs by looking at his or her cell phone, taking a call or text, or justifying his busy-ness or responsibilities to keep moving. Imagine you are the **Levite**, a Temple Assistant, descended from Jacob, with temple duties of setting up the tent, the holy of holies, and the elements. They loved the Lord and took their duties seriously, as listed in the Leviticus passage I read – often called the “Holiness Code”. One would think this individual would have compassion on the man: “Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord . . . love your neighbor as yourself”, but he too crossed over to the other side. The text does not tell us why, so we might speculate that he feared being attacked by bandits himself or more likely that he did not want contamination by this unclean man, obviously not a holy person.

The next person that comes by is from Samaria. **Samaritans** were descendants of a mixed population living in the land following the conquest of Assyria in 722 BCE. They opposed rebuilding the Temple and were considered ceremonially unclean. Imagine you are this person who takes seven actions to help the wounded man: he approaches him, binds his wounds, anoints him with oil for comfort, loads him on his mule, takes him to an inn, and cares and prays for him. The man paid two denarii or two days' wages for three and a half weeks of recovery. In today's hospitals and rehabs, it's even more expensive!

Now, can you imagine yourself being the **lawyer** who asked the question in the first place? Jesus tells the story in response to this Old Testament law expert's question "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Originally, I thought perhaps he was seeking God, but commentaries say no, he was trying to trick Jesus. This law debate was a diversion to Jesus' teachings, and a self-justification. He only knew the Levitical law, was exclusive in his cultural relationships, and could not understand how Jesus had come to fulfill the law. This expert was a rigid judge of people, not a compassionate or generous fellow. However, Jesus' story turned the question back to the lawyer who began to see things differently. If an unclean Samaritan could care for a Jew, then the 613 Levitical laws meant nothing! Jesus' love means more; it came through the story, and the law expert did answer correctly: my neighbor is the man who showed mercy.

Neighbors in this passage are not the victims of the crime but are the ones who serve others. I believe we as a church were good neighbors yesterday for Agnes' family, who we did not know until her death. It was uncomfortable at first, since we had a certain image of her, and yet in our love for her, we welcomed everyone. And wasn't that a blessing to us? I'm not patting us on the back here, just using an illustration. Please remember the good feels of getting to know her children and friends we did not know, like Sandy, Vanessa, Rosemary, and Sarah.

Jesus was the ultimate good neighbor, never judging the sinful, only offering salvation, grace, and mercy to them, and to us. We should be careful not to make any one of the characters out to be sinister; the parable uses illustrations that would have transformed the perceptions of

his hearers. Isn't that how we evangelize and shepherd others? We accept people where they are and how they behave, then offer the goodness of Christ in prayer and blessing. God does the rest if there are open hearts. This parable is often used to help children want to perform good deeds out of love and compassion; it was one of many stories about eternal life.

How do you feel as you read and re-read this parable in the context of several weeks of Kingdom parables? It is an important one as we come to the final 1/3 our year of "Listening for the Work" God is directing us to do. Faith is sufficient for belief yet works is the **fruit** of that belief. Through our good works and living service, not only are we rewarded, but others see Jesus in our deeds. A life of service as we saw through Libby, Agnes, and many of you tells the Gospel story without words. Am I a good neighbor? Are we as a church a good neighbor? When there are so many needs, how do we stay encouraged and generous with our time and resources? We are held accountable every Sunday and every day through Scripture, prayer, and the fellowship of believers. We must never become complacent, yet assistance and help appear in different ways than they did for the Samaritan. Sometimes it is providing a listening ear, praying together, making announcements, singing a solo, performing an instrumental duet or writing a sermon. Other times service is painting a yellow safety stripe on the curb, trimming bushes or pulling weeds, providing food for fellowship and comfort.

These are words for consideration and discernment. How do we as a small community serve a larger one and influence it for Christ? Keep listening! Be the Good Samaritan as you have been; do not grow weary in doing good ("So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we

will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Galatians 6:9 ^{NLT}.”) The Samaritan and the innkeeper both practiced hospitality, the “love of a stranger”. I suggest that 4 of our 6 characters were likely transformed: the lawyer (In Real Life), and in the story--the Samaritan (already merciful but now encouraged and rewarded), the wounded, healed Jewish robbery victim, and the innkeeper. As you do your homework re-reading and imagining the characters and setting, ponder my assessment, and listen for the work God is leading us toward. And from last week, remember that God redeems the wounded and soiled through his Son, and God heals and clothes the redeemed with new cloth and new life! Sometimes, we are the mediators and his instruments. Only when we love others do we truly love the Lord! Amen! ||

Will you pray with me? Lord, thank you for this reminder that you are the ultimate neighbor and healer, transforming us and others who desire to know you. Help us to serve in our actions, not just words or prayers. Make us more courageous and merciful to help those in need. Let us humbly put our own needs in proper perspective, as we share the Gospel and parables with others, so that they may know you. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**