



## “Won’t You Be Their Neighbor?”

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost  
8:15 and 11:00 a.m., Sunday, July 10, 2016  
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25:1-10;  
Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Well this week I got in trouble. Why are you laughing? My wife went over to the counter and looked at it and turned to me as I was sitting there and said, “Did you leave this counter a mess?” Now I, always, always clean the work spaces that are before me. I was incredulous, I said, “Honey, how can you even say that. I would never, never leave the counter top a mess. Surely you didn’t think I did it? It must have been our daughter Krista.” I was so offended that she would think that I would do this on purpose. I immediately got up and went to find Krista so that I could interrogate her as to where she was and whether or not she was the one who actually made the mess on the counter top. Now part of the mess at the counter top were there were coffee grinds all over the counter top. My wife drinks tea. I really felt that there was no way that I could have done that. I am conscientious enough to clean up after myself, and so I found myself wanting to somehow prove to her that I had actually cleaned everything up the way I always think I should and do usually, clean things up. I felt I needed to give her the excuse so that she could know that I believe the way I believe, the way I want it, and that I was good enough. Now you might be asking yourself what does this have to do with the gospel?

The lawyer who comes to Jesus is trying to do exactly the same thing. What’s good enough? He’s able to recite all of the basics after all. He wants to “justify himself” and he knows the basic principles of the Torah, the law. He knows the Shema, the prayer that every adult Jewish male would recite two or three times a day, loving the Lord your God, and loving him alone. He was certainly familiar with other passages in the Old Testament about caring for one’s neighbor, treating aliens or strangers with respect. He was familiar no doubt with the command to love the Lord God with all his heart. These ancient texts were a part of who he was, how he was raised, they represented who he was as a teacher of the law. He knew the words, but that kept him at a surface level of his own morality and ethics.

He asked Jesus the follow up question, who is my neighbor, because he wants the love of God to have some limits after all. That was the nature as he saw it, of the law.

Jesus responds with this wonderful parable well know. A parable about what seems to be a hopeless situation. A man is beaten and left in a ditch. We hear about two other

people walking by, a priest and a Levite, both of whom who would also have known the Shema. They would have certainly understood the commandments to love God and love neighbor, and yet what they do is simply pass by without even investigating what is the situation, what is the problem.

Instead the man is seen by a Samaritan and cared for. Now Samaria is the region between Galilee and Judea. There was a hatred of Jews and Samaritans going back hundreds of years. For hundreds of years they have hated each other, both sides claimed the true religion. Both sides saw themselves as inheritors of the promises of Abraham and Moses. Both sides claimed the land as theirs (much like you might see the Israelites and Palestinians doing today.) Religious Jews considered Samaritans children from another mother, close but no cigar apostate followers of God.

Jesus asked the teacher of the law, which one was a neighbor to the man? He can't even bring himself to say Samaritan, did you notice that? The one who shows him mercy, he says. And it is the Samaritan who shows mercy, love and compassion. Showing compassion and mercy, loving others, is a part of God's nature. That's why we are called to do it. It's what God does as neighbor to us, loving you and me unconditionally, and so Jesus tells the lawyer to go and do likewise. In spite of any of the religious laws that might have been broken by going over and perhaps touching a dead man in a ditch, making one ritually impure, the Samaritan breaks all of those rules. He's not supposed to associate with him, he's not supposed to touch him, and yet he does. And Jesus is showing the very character and nature of God. But notice brothers and sisters, compassion and love always trumps the rules. And we see how expansive is God's grace and mercy. It's so expansive that God was even willing to die for it, willing to offer it to you and to me, knowing sinners who often fall short in so many ways. But thanks be to God for Jesus! God is a God of mercy and forgiveness and grace. Not just for you and for me but for the whole world. . . . Jew, Samaritan, Christian, Muslim, Gay, Straight, Rich, Poor, Black, White, Asian, Young, Old, All.

It's important for us to recognize that the moral of this story is not just that we should help people when they're in a ditch. We would miss the irony and the scandal of this story that it must have been for Jesus' Jewish hearers. It is the hated, reviled, half-breed Samaritan who shows compassion!

Brothers and sisters don't just love people who look like you. Love and care for people most *different* from you. Be **their** neighbor.

So republicans out there, love and care for your democrat neighbors.  
Whites love and care for your black neighbors.  
Rich love and care your poor neighbors.  
Straight people love and care your gay neighbors.  
Christians love and care your Muslim neighbors  
and vice-versa.

Recognize your neighbor in everyone, because that is part of the diversity of God, this wonderful mosaic of humanity. . . and if so, then you will know your neighbor and can fulfill the commandment of God to love him and to love and serve others.

And if we don't, if we don't, we all might be left for dead in a ditch, hopeless and despairing. But show mercy, Jesus says, and we will live.

Won't you please, won't you please?  
Won't you be their neighbor?  
Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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