

“Won’t You Be My Neighbor? ---Who Is My Neighbor?

Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rik23XPhxmc&feature=youtu.be>

(Babies hugging)

Now wouldn’t that be a great neighborhood? Hugs---fat-free, sugar-free, gluten-free, calorie-free, requires no battery, requires no electricity---just requires a heart of loving others. But it seems that our world and “neighborhood” isn’t quite like that.

It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood here at PHUMC, but what about outside these doors. Can we say outside these walls---Won’t you please, please won’t you be my neighbor? So, we begin a series today and for the next 2 Sundays with messages about being a neighbor.

Of course, America’s favorite neighbor was Fred Rogers. Mister Roger’s Neighborhood was on Public Television from 1968-2001. Mr. Rogers died in 2003. He was known for his sweaters, particularly his red sweater. (image)



Fred Rogers told EmmyTVLegends.org this: “My mother, for as long as I could remember, made at least one sweater every month.” “She would give us each a hand-knit sweater every Christmas. Until she died those zipper sweaters that I wore on the ‘Neighborhood’ were all made by my mother.”

You may not have known that Rogers had a Bachelor of Music degree from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. And perhaps some of you may know that Fred Rogers had his Master of Divinity Degree and was an ordained Presbyterian minister.

Let’s connect the most famous Neighborhood, with the most famous Biblical story about neighbors. Read for us this morning was the story of the Good Samaritan. Many even unchurched can relate some of the ideas behind the story of the Good Samaritan. Why you will even hear newscasters and reports well people call people a “Good Samaritan” if they helped someone.

An expert in the law asked Jesus a very important question. Now by law what is meant is the Mosaic Law, the law of Moses. This would include not only the 10 Commandments, but other of the laws that Moses gave.

He asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This is a great question. I hope you have considered this question. So, Jesus answers with a question, “What is written in the Law?” The man gives a great answer. 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.’”**

Great answer, in fact Jesus says, ²⁸ **“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”**

Now let me stop and say there is a difference between what we say and what we do. This man who knows religion says the right thing. Jesus tells him “DO this.” It’s like the saying that says, “After all is said and done, more is said than done.”

Now notice the response: ²⁹ **But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

Oh, beloved how many times do we say something to try and justify ourselves. “I’d be a better neighbor, but you haven’t met my neighbor.” (By the way we will talk about ‘bad neighbors’ in our series.) “I just don’t have time to be neighborly.” Excuses are a plenty. I know I can, and perhaps you can identify with trying to justify yourself. It seems especially today that we live in a culture when nothing is ever our fault---it is always someone else’s fault.

Jesus then tells a parable about a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. Kind of starts out like a joke. A pastor, priest, rabbi, walk into a bar. **(image)**



Okay, not that kind of bar---and it wasn’t a pastor, priest and rabbi---but a preist, Levite and Samaritan. A priest was a desencentend of Aaron and responsibilities in the temple. A Levite, from the tribe of Levi, assisted the priests. The priest and Levite of course were Jewish. A Smaritan, with all due respect were considered mixed both religiously, and in race. They had pagan tendencies, not God fearers. And their marriages were intermingled. Samaritans and Jews practiced open hostilities.

There was a man that had been attacked by robbers. Stripped of his clothes and beaten. So with this man lying in such hurt along comes the Preist, Levite, and Samaritan walking down the same road. All walking separately, and yet we find one of these is not like the other.

About the same exact wording is said of the Priest and the Levite, “when they saw him (the man injured) they passed by on the other side.” I’ve always wondered how close they got to him. Or did they just see him and decide not to get involved and go out of their way.

Now I do want to let you know that a priest must avoid the dead. Even touching the dead or waving hand over dead person would make the priest impure. If that happened then his temple service was at risk. The Levite also wanted to follow the law. I wonder if they even got close enough to see if he were dead or alive.

³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

He didn’t go to the other side. He touched him. He bandaged him and even put him on his own donkey, took him to an inn and paid for his stay.

Fred Rogers says this: “Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like 'struggle.' To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now – and to go on caring even through times that may bring us pain.”

(The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember)

Jesus asks which of the 3 do you think was a neighbor. The expert of the law responds correctly by saying “The one who had mercy on him.” He couldn’t even bring himself to say the word Samaritan.

How hard is it to not just say the right thing, but do the right thing?

On October 4 there was an article in USA Today entitled: Don't blame incivility on religion. Christian principles are an antidote to nastiness.

It was written by Daniel Darling who is vice president of communications at The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and author of several books. (including "The Dignity Revolution: Reclaiming God's Rich Vision for Humanity.")

I found the article profound. Here are some excerpts. Daniel Darling says this: “it’s not our belief system that is the problem, it’s that we have strayed from what we say we believe. If Christians truly believe that Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life,” we are compelled to follow him into the world, loving our neighbors and caring for the people he came to redeem.

“when you encounter unkindness by a Christian, you can almost always point to a way in which their behavior violates Scripture. It is not our beliefs themselves that seem to be fueling incivility but a failure to apply what we say we believe.

“the core Christian conviction that Jesus is Lord, lived out in real time, produces a kind of holy abandonment, releasing Christians to give of themselves in service to the most vulnerable in their communities and around the world.

“Fear and a lack of love are at odds with the kind of virtues genuine faith in Christ promises to produce, virtues such as gentleness, faith and love.... To be uncivil then is to be un-Christian.

“While we should lament the way evangelical public witness has often been damaged due to our own lack of love, we don’t have to look far to figure out how to fix our civility problem. It turns out that if you want Christians to be more civil, you need Christians to be more ... Christian.”

Is it really that hard? Let me put in a simple Mr. Rogers way. A quote from him: “There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.”

And yet we struggle with “who is my neighbor.” Maybe the question is not “Who is my neighbor,” but “How do I neighbor?”

On Mr. Rogers Neighborhood there was Officer Clemons. Francois Clemmons. He was the first African American to have a recurring role on a children TV series. And then came episode 1065 in 1969. Now although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed it for all practical purposes it was not enforced. Swimming pools around the south were still segregated. Martin Luther King had been assassinated in 1968. And then Mr. Rogers did this **(image)**



Yes, he asked Officer Clemmons to join him and cool his feet in the plastic wading pool.

In 1993 the last time Clemmons was on the show, they repeated this scene. **(Image)**



Amazing. Black and white together. And then to make it more profound---**(image)**



They used the same towel. I think Jesus washed others feet!

Who is our neighbor? Is our neighbor rich, poor? White, black? Heterosexual, homosexual? Educated, uneducated? Single or with family? Christian, non-Christian, another faith? Married, or living together? How do we neighbor?

You will never look into the eyes of someone who God does not love.

Is it a beautiful day in the neighborhood? Could it be? Should it be? Not just what we say, but what we do.

Jesus came for us to follow Him. Jesus came to bring hope, peace, love, joy.

John 1:14 The Message (MSG) 14 The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.

And what about us? Who is my neighbor? Can we say, “Won’t you please? Won’t you please. Please won’t you be my neighbor.”

Not just in saying it. Meaning it.

I close the message today as Jesus closed His story of the Good Samaritan.

“Go and do likewise.”