

“Like a Good Neighbor”

Luke 10:25-37

Series: Love Comes to Town Week 5 – Loving Your Neighbor

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Ever had a time when you *look* but you don't *see*? For years you've heard me speak about my wonderful neighbors Warner and Hilda Carmen. When it came to the Art of Neighboring they were on the level of Michelangelo. So you can understand why Lisa and I were devastated when they passed away and why we were concerned about who was the next to move in next door. I jokingly told the Carmen's son Scott that I had to approve who would get the house.

Then one day, I saw strangers standing in the backyard. I told Lisa, “I think the new neighbors are here, let's go meet them.” We walked over and introduced ourselves. She replied, “Hi Pastor Doug, I'm Arlene and this is my daughter Chloe.” I was surprised she knew me because I did not recognize her. Then she added, “I'm Beth's daughter” and pointed to another lady standing there. I looked at her with a dumb clueless smile. I put out my hand to introduce myself. Then I saw her. “Beth! Beth Wall!” Beth has been part of the Woodside family for 15 years...when I baptized. Then I remembered meeting Arlene and Chloe at Beth's house. God provided wonderful neighbors to take the place of the Carmen's. When I first looked at my neighbors, they were strangers. But God opened my eyes to see family.

“Who is my neighbor?” This is one of the most crucial questions of our lives. If we want to make God's Love Come to Town then we must love in two directions.

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ (Deuteronomy 6:5); and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Leviticus 19:18) “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” Luke 10:27-28

Jesus says this is the summary of the whole Bible, the purpose of life, the highest of all goals, your Dominant Life Principle. He repeats it so often, a lawyer, one of his critics, can repeat it back to Him. We must love in two directions – up toward God and out toward our neighbor. Now I assume, if you are sitting here in worship, you obviously know and want to love God. But the next question is not so obvious. This lawyer asks Jesus to give him the specifics.

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Luke 10:29 Lawyers like to be precise. Let's get it in writing. Let's draw the line. Who is my neighbor and who's not? Who am I commanded to love and who can I ignore? When it comes to love, how far do I have to go? Let's be honest and realistic. I can't love everyone. In fact, there are some people I don't want to love. If I'm an Eagles fan do I really have to love a Cowboys fan? If I'm a Nittany Lion, I don't really have to love a Michigan Wolverine, do I? (Yes, you do!) If I'm a Democrat or Republican, do I have to love the other side? Do I have to love my angry boss, my annoying neighbor, my obnoxious in-laws, my ungrateful kids, my selfish sibling, my deceptive Ex? Do I have to love illegal immigrants, drug addicts, the homeless and anyone else who looks different, acts differently, believes differently or thinks differently than me? Let's get specific Jesus!

Jesus does not want us to just look at people. He wants us to see them – to see them as neighbors who have needs. The truth is: we all have needs. We all need God. We all need love. We all need help. We may have physical, emotional, mental or spiritual needs. Jesus wants to open our eyes to the needs of all the neighbors around us. You know the jingle: Like a Good Neighbor... State Farm is there! So is Jesus. He's always there when you are in need, when a neighbor is in need, when anyone is in need. To explain his definition of neighbor, Jesus doesn't give the lawyer a legal brief. He answers the question, "Who's my neighbor?" by telling a story. We call it the parable of the Good Samaritan.

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. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 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. Luke 10:30-34

In Jesus' story, a man gets mugged by a gang. Yet lucky for him two church people come along! They look at him lying on the street but surprisingly move to the other side and pass by. He is left for dead until a Samaritan rides by and offers the beaten man the one thing we desperately need in our world: Love. Not a sentimental or romantic love but a fierce love called compassion. Christian compassion isn't just sympathy. Sympathy means you feel bad for somebody. Compassion means you are so deeply moved by someone's need it becomes personal. You don't just look and pass by. You see the need of your neighbor and you must do something. There are three truths in this story which reveal the radical love Jesus has for us and He wants us to show our neighbors.

Love is **Restoration more than Observation**. It's more than looking at suffering people from the safety of our TV or Facebook feed. We can look at refugees from a war, villagers without clean water, homeless veterans sleeping on steam grates, struggling parents or seniors trying to make ends meet. Do we see their needs? Jesus doesn't want us to be people who passively observe needs, shake our heads and say, "Someone ought to do something about that. I'm gonna pray somebody helps you!" If not me and you, then who? This is why Woodside exists. If we do not love our neighbors in need, we need to close our doors.

Did you notice the Priest and Levite are "going down from Jerusalem to Jericho"? What was in Jerusalem? The Temple! They were on the way home from church. They just fulfilled their religious duties. They probably had lots of excuses for not stopping: Pastor Doug preached too long or we're late for brunch or the Eagles game is on. They "did their duty" by going to church. And that's the danger for folks like you and me. We invest an hour at church, sing songs to Jesus, hear the preaching of His Word and remain unchanged! We can be too busy and blind to the needs on our doorstep. We may observe needs and pass by on the other side of the road.

When I was in seminary, I was in a carpool with other students who lived at married student housing. We were a little late for class and driving up Quakerbridge Road when we saw the wife of our classmate stranded on the side of the road with a flat tire. And she was pregnant. Now I wanted to stop but my classmates said, "We can't. We're late for preaching class. They're waiting

for us to deliver our sermons.” So we drove on by. I’ve always felt terrible that I didn’t get out and let them go. How can we preach the Word and not live it? Jesus calls us to do something – to roll up our sleeves and restore lives not just observe problems and pass by.

The second truth we learn is **Neighbors Are Not Just Next to Us**. The lawyer asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” We think of people in the house or condo next door. It’s the guy who puts his recycling out on the wrong day. It’s the family with the kids in soccer you see at Back-to-School night. We think neighboring is about proximity. Jesus explodes this myth: Your neighbors are not just those who look like you, who live where you live or vote the way you vote. In fact, Jesus turns the lawyer’s question around. The lawyer wants a limit. He asks, “Who is my neighbor?” so he knows who he must love and who he can avoid. At the end Jesus asks, “Who was a neighbor to the man?” Be a neighbor to everyone, without limit.

After Jesus describes the Priest and Levite going by, the audience probably expects the hero of the story, the one who saves the wounded man and saves the day, to be a Jewish layperson. That would please the crowd. The good guy is someone just like us. Imagine the shock and disgust when Jesus said, “But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him” (Luke 10:33). Jews and Samaritans hated each other. To the Jews, Samaritans were half-breeds and heretics. A Jewish king ordered the destruction of the Samaritan Temple. The Samaritans defiled the Jewish Temple. Not much love between them.

When Jesus chooses a Samaritan, the sworn enemy of the Jews, to be the one who has compassion on a battered Jewish man, who provides the first aid the Levite didn’t give, who places him on his animal as the Priest could have done and who pays out of his own pocket the money the robbers stole, he teaches that love breaks through barriers and biases, preconceptions and prejudices. The Samaritan did not let race, creed or social background stop him. Neighbors aren’t always those next to us. The neighbor is anyone who needs help! Loving your neighbor means crossing the street. You intentionally step over economic divides, language barriers, political differences and meet the need. When Jesus asks the lawyer, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” the legal expert is so disgusted by Jesus’ choice of a Samaritan he can’t bring himself to say it. “The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’” (Luke 10:37).

Jesus wants you to love more than just the neighbors next to you. He wants to open your eyes to the wider needs around you. There are neighbors in need of love all around us! The Question is: Do we have eyes to see and a heart to help? Christ-centered love always takes the time to cross the street. Next week you will have an amazing opportunity to get out of this building, cross the street and love our neighbors with the Church Has Left the Building.

- You will build a home with Habitat for Humanity
- You serve meals to the hungry people of Trenton with TASK
- You will restore a shelter for women escaping abuse
- You will write letters to encourage soldiers serving our nation far from home
- You will organize clothing donations for those living in Bristol
- You will sew pillowcase dresses for Clothed with Compassion
- You will make chili and serve it to people living on the streets

- And many more projects.

We have projects for all ages and skills. And I'll let you in on a little secret: even though we call it the Church Has Left the Building there are several projects in the building. So, if you are only able to give God one-hour next Sunday, you can still join in and do one. I even went so far as to contact the Federal Government and ask them for help. They said they are having this shut down right so they couldn't do much, but they said how about this: We'll give you an extra hour of sleep next Sunday. I told them I'll take it. Please sign up now so we know how many will attend and so the project leaders can send you instructions. Then come back Sunday night for a delicious dinner at 5:30 pm followed by worship, communion and a celebration of all that God did through you. We'll hear a message by Pastor Raymond Garcia, director of the Philly Project who will inspire us to keep loving our neighbors near and far. Love crosses the street. Love gets down on its knees and personally shares the love of Jesus with compassion and care. Now is the time for us to love and serve our neighbors in need.

The third truth Jesus teaches is the **Compassion Has A Cost**. The Samaritan pays an incredible cost to care for this stranger. He spends his time going out of his way to bandage and bring him to the inn. He puts his life on the line when he travels through enemy territory, carrying a half dead Jewish man into a Jewish town. A mob would instantly accuse *him* of attacking the victim. He takes two days' wages out of wallet and pays the man's hotel bill and promises to cover any debt this stranger charges. Who would do such a thing not just for a neighbor but for an enemy?

Jesus! The Good Samaritan points to the Great Samaritan. With great compassion Jesus saw our need - the brokenness of our lives. You and I were lying spiritually dead in the gutter, bruised and broken by sin. Helpless to help ourselves. We were in fact God's enemies when He sent Jesus to love us and save us. Moved by great mercy, he paid our bill in full – a bill we could never pay ourselves. It cost Jesus everything!

When we give, it's never to pay God back, which we can't. When we give, it's never to prove we are good or impress other people. We give because we are grateful for all Jesus has done for us. We give so we can pass on the love of Jesus to other neighbors in need. Woodside is a tithing church. We take 11% of what you give us and send it back out the door into the community to help people in need! That's our HEART as a church! I believe in tithing. I personally tithe and I encourage you to tithe or grow toward tithing.

Today is the day when we make our commitments to God's work through Woodside in 2026. Today, I ask you to Grow in your Giving over last year. Why? So we can Love More. Love more mothers and babies in Siavonga, Zambia so they can receive safe maternal care.

Love more people in Kazakhstan who get to hear the Gospel through people like Jacob Outcalt

Love more teens like the 60 whose lives were changed at the camp led by Markie and Nathaniel

Love more children like the 3rd graders who received their first Bibles last week

Love more people seeking recovery, homeless neighbors seeking shelter, Habitat families seeking a home, hungry Bucks County, Trenton and Philly neighbors seeking a meal

Love more in the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas and Appalachia through our mission teams.

Love more students and families at Urban Promise Trenton

Love more victims of natural disasters like the floods in Texas

That's what it means to "love your neighbor"—it means you're willing to sacrifice for people who can't possibly pay you back! We follow in the loving footsteps of Jesus Christ the Great Samaritan.

When we sacrifice to serve our neighbor—to really love them at a point of need—it costs us. You start to see the needs of your neighbors and love them out of gratitude for the one who laid down his life for you. People ask me, "How many members do you have?" They want to know the size and strength of our church. They are always shocked when I tell them we have zero members. Then they feel sorry for me – like I must be the worst preacher in Christendom. Friends God doesn't care how many names are on the rolls or behinds in the seats but how many servants are in the streets. We hope people will say "Woodside is the church where they love. They don't care who you are, what you look like, where you've been, what you've done, they just love you the way Jesus does!"