“Get Over Yourself”

Rev. E. Stanley Ott
Luke 10:38-42
March 16, 2014
This month, we are focusing on what it means to love our neighbors. “Love your neighbor as yourself,” says the Great Commandment. As Pete said last week, your neighbor is anyone near you. This morning, we address some of the things that keep us from attending to the person next to us—our neighbor next door, our neighbors at work, our neighbor in the pew. It’s like sitting in a different seat during worship. The people around you may be less familiar to you. What does it take to reach out to offer a warm greeting and what would hold you back?

The entire tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke speaks to neighboring. It begins with Jesus sending seventy disciples, two by two, into the neighboring towns to bless and to serve them. Then he tells the story of the Good Samaritan, in which we learn the true neighbor of the fallen person was the one who showed mercy. Today, we come to the next story, the story of Martha and Mary, as we think about some of the things that hinder or help us in the neighboring of our neighbor.

We will walk through this short story to see what nuggets we may find. *Now as they went on their way [Jesus and his disciples], he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.* Now, unlike the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus isn’t the victim of a robbery lying in the road like the victim, but he is on the road. He is traveling ultimately for Jerusalem and his own death. So, who is the neighbor of Martha and Mary in this story? It’s actually Jesus, himself. Jesus is your neighbor also and you, too, may welcome him into your life.

*She [Martha] had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying.* The word “Lord” is used three times in this brief story. They knew very well who Jesus was. And we know Jesus had been to their home many times. He was their friend of the heart and they were his friends of the heart. And while Martha had a bit of a run in with Jesus, just remember he was very close to her and her family. We see that in Jesus’ tears when her brother Lazarus dies.

*But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.’* For Martha it’s all about the to-do list. She is like the Levite and priest in the story of the Good Samaritan, the to-do list pressing, too busy to stop.

Reminds me of the White Rabbit with his giant watch running away from Alice in Wonderland crying, “I’m late, I’m late, for a very important date. No time to say
“Hello,” goodbye I’m late, I’m late, I’m late.” Ever feel like that? The White Rabbit has no time to neighbor his neighbor Alice. His do-list is pressing. I’m late, I’m late, I’m late!

So are you really too busy to focus on your neighbors, the people God puts right next to you or in front of you? I like to call our over busyness “The Law of Present Demand.” It was surely the White Rabbit’s problem! Present demand includes all of the things coming at you, demanding you right now. It’s what Jim Dobson calls “the sustained panic”, what John Ortberg calls “hurry sickness” and what Paula Dvorak called “time confetti” in her recent Post article about the new book, Overwhelmed, on being too busy to live. Our experience of the Law of Present Demand neutralizes our neighboring of our neighbors in three ways. The pressure of present demand relegates any non-pressing item to the bottom of the list. The routine of present demand convinces us that everything we are doing is necessary. The comfort of present demand lulls us into thinking that while we complain about our busyness, we actually like it. We are accustomed to the demand and would not know what to do without it.

Some years ago, the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Boulder, Colorado, Bob Oerter, led a retreat with a bunch of us who were being crushed by the Law of Present Demand. He offered this amazing word, “Learn to live with the load of the unfinished!” That has stuck with me ever since. His point was no matter how much you and I do, there is always more to be done. In a society where we have to “get all of this stuff done,” our sense of “present demand” overwhems our priorities and easily diverts us from loving our neighbors, neighboring our neighbors. Learn to live with the load of the unfinished so that like Mary you take time for Jesus, you take time for your neighbors, you take time for yourself and for those you love.

So Martha said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha…/[He says her name twice; He has to penetrate her manic demand driven do-list], you are worried and distracted by many things. The word distracted here means literally to be drawn away and she certainly was drawn away from Jesus. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her. We have no indication that Mary was a lazy bones slouch, yet, in this moment, Mary was neighboring Jesus and sits with him. She
certainly had her own do-list and pressure of present demand but she knew a life-priority when she saw it. Mary got over herself and gave herself to Jesus. Get over yourself and neighbor the neighbor our Lord puts near you.

We all know there is some normal anxiety that may go with connecting with a neighbor that we may not know very well, and we all know the easy excuse of the pressure of present demand. This is why, realistically, I am inclined to believe that I can talk about neighboring all day long but you won’t actually do it unless you receive the people eyes of Jesus. People eyes see people the way Jesus sees them.

Henry Brinton, over at the Fairfax Presbyterian Church, tells the story of a young and successful executive who was traveling down a neighborhood street, going a bit too fast in his new Jaguar S-Type sedan. He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars, however, and slowed down when he thought he saw something. As his car passed, no children appeared. Instead, a brick smashed into the Jag’s side door! The fellow slams on the brakes and spins the Jag back to the spot from where the brick had been thrown.

He jumps out of the car, sees a kid standing there and grabs him saying, "Just what are you doing? That's a new car and that brick you threw is going to cost a lot of money. Why did you do it?" "Please, mister, please. I'm sorry, I didn't know what else to do," cried the boy. "I threw the brick because no one else would stop." Tears were dripping down the boy's face as he pointed around the parked car. "It's my brother," he said. "he rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up." Sobbing, the boy asked the executive, "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me." Deeply moved, the driver tried to swallow the rising lump in his throat. He lifted the young man back into the wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts off the boy, checking to see that everything was going to be okay. "Thank you," the grateful child said to him.

The man watched the little boy push his brother down the sidewalk toward their home. It was a long, slow walk back to his Jaguar. He never did repair the side door. He kept the dent to remind him not to go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention.1

“Don't Wait for the Brick” a sermon by Henry G. Brinton, Fairfax Presbyterian Church, February 23, 2003
He got over himself. He received people eyes, the eyes of Jesus for people. May you and I get over ourselves in the manner of our Lord Jesus Christ who got over himself on our behalf and receive his people eyes. May you have people eyes for your neighbors at home, work and in life. Like Mary did for her neighbor, Jesus, interrupt your pressure of present demand for the people God puts into your life.

When you think about it, people eyes lead you to interrupt your life the way the Good Samaritan’s people eyes led him to interrupt his journey to tend to a fallen stranger. Jesus did this all the time. On his way to the town of Bethany, he runs into blind Bartimaeus and Jesus’ people eyes led him to interrupt his walk. He was going on a tour of some cities when a leper confronted him and Jesus’ people eyes led him to interrupt his mission. Jesus came upon the funeral procession of a little boy and seeing the grieving mother with his people eyes, Jesus interrupted his walk. Embrace the interruption! When you see people the way Jesus sees them, you get over yourself, get over your to-do list, your anxiety, embrace the interruption and focus on those people.

People stay inside their homes so much today. When you see your chance to connect, you get over yourself—embrace the interruption in whatever you are doing! You see your neighbors working in their gardens. Embrace the interruption. Out the door you go. You see your neighbor raking leaves, walking the dog, mowing the lawn. Embrace the interruption! Out you go. If someone in your office is sitting in their cubicle or office eating a sandwich and not doing much else at the moment, get over your own busy moment, embrace the interruption and go chat with that neighbor. You can go even further as you invite them over for burgers in the summer and to your home during the holidays. You look for ways to connect and allow the circumstances of the moment to open doors for you to become the love of God in their lives.

I would like to invite you to watch a simple video called, “Get Service.” You can see it on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfeXkbgCVE. Pay attention to how the Pressure of Present Demand shapes what the man is thinking. He certainly hasn’t learned to live with the load of the unfinished. Watch how his discovery of people eyes leads him to get over himself, to interrupt his own life and to neighbor his neighbor.
Receive people eyes, see people the way Jesus sees them. It helps you set aside the Law of Present Demand in your own life and learn to live with the load of the unfinished. Receive people eyes, get over yourself and “embrace the interruption,” when our Lord puts someone next to you—a neighbor. Allow the Holy Spirit to love your neighbor through you and in doing so you will discover that love for yourself in new and wonderful ways.

Benediction: We have been the Church Gathered, We are now the Church Dispersed.
Remember: Wherever you go, Christ Goes, Whatever you do, Christ Does.
If someone asks what your church is like tell them, ‘I am what my church is like.’
If someone asks what your church does, tell them ‘My church does what I do.’
Remember, You may well be the only authentic contact someone has with Jesus Christ because they will not come to church but you can bring the church to them.

Former US Senate Chaplain Richard C. Halverson

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