

Like A Good Neighbor©

Luke 10:25-37 (NLT)

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As I was reading the gospel lesson from Luke 10:25-37, and was thinking about a sermon title for the story, I kept hearing that little jingle from the State Farm ad: “And like a good neighbor State Farm is there.” Seemed like an appropriate sermon title for this morning so I went with it.

This morning I want to do something different with the Scripture and sermon. Instead of reading the entire passage and then preaching I’d like to do more of an expositional sermon – where we take a portion of the scripture and talk about that portion before going on.

But this is also an opportunity for some dialog. I know that some of you were at Bible Study last Wednesday night and had some time to discuss this passage so I want to invite your thoughts, your discussion into the sermon. I think being outside in this informal setting, gives us the perfect place to do this different thing.

The main thing is, if you talk to me, speak loudly so everyone can hear.

Let’s take a moment to pray, shall we?

Now, reading and discussing Luke 10:25-37, using the *New Living Translation*: Hear the Word of the Lord!

²⁵ One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”

Who were the lawyers, the ‘experts in religious law’? What do you think his motive is?

²⁶ Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?”

What law is Jesus referring to? What is the ‘Law of Moses?’

²⁷ The man answered, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ (Deuteronomy 6:5)

And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Leviticus 19:18)

²⁸ “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!” *What does this mean? Above, the lawyer refers to it as ‘eternal life.’ Here Jesus says ‘you will live.’ Just what is eternal life?*

²⁹ The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

He was being purposefully contentious, implying that the summary of the law is too general. It is too nonspecific to be helpful. He was being a protagonist. We read of that often in the Gospels: Pharisees trying to catch Jesus in looking foolish; trying to cause him to look bad in the eyes of the people.

³⁰ Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

The road to Jericho is very steep. It drops some 1500 feet and is curving and very dangerous, especially back in that time. Bandits would find really great places to hide and was able to jump out and attack their victims without anyone ever seeing them until it was too late.

Why this Jewish man was on this dangerous road alone is something we don’t know. Surely it must have been important for him to make the trip because he most certainly would have known how dangerous the road could be.

And there he was, lying there on the road, half dead, beaten, robbed, stripped of his clothing, left to die.

³¹ “By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. ³² A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

And we have these two respectable people – religious people – who come down the road. They are in a hurry, it seems. And they see the man lying there on the side of the road. The priest crosses over to the other side, getting as far away from him as possible. Moving along to his destination. And then a temple assistant does the same thing. He looks at the man, but hurried on to the other side as well.

What do you feel when you hear this? Two respectable religious temple workers cross to the other side to avoid having to help this poor, beaten man.

My first gut reaction is anger. I think it is terrible that they don’t stop and help him. I think they seem to be lacking in any kind of compassion and care.

But think about it. If you were by yourself, walking in a place that was known to be dangerous and you were just wanting to hurry and get out of that place; and if you perhaps had a destination that needed to be reached by a certain time, what would you do? And if you saw someone lying on the road, would you go help? Would you just assume they were dead and you couldn’t do anything anyway, except maybe call the police after you reached your destination? And what if you were a Jewish priest and had spent all the necessary time going through the ritual of purification, knowing that you would have to do it all over again if you touched a dead body and knowing there would not be time for that once you got to your service, what would you do? And maybe you are concerned that it is a set up – the man lying there isn’t hurt at all, but is faking it so someone would come help and then others would jump out from the rocks and attack you.

There really are a lot of possible reasons why the two men did not go to help. Thinking about all those things we might be a little more understanding. Still, they sure didn't show any compassion, did they? I hope I would take a chance and help. But who knows?

³³ “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. ³⁴ Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, ^[c] telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’

We’ve talked a great deal about why the Jews and the Samaritans despised each other. We just recently heard how Jesus sent his disciples ahead to see if the Samaritans would receive him in their village and how they rejected him and Peter and John were so mad they wanted to rain fire down on their heads. Jesus stopped them and rebuked them for even thinking such a thing.

But here is a man who did take the time and make the effort to help the poor beaten, robbed Jewish man, risking his own safety, using his own oil and wine and animal, spending his own money on someone his people thought of as the enemy, knowing that the feeling was mutual. It’s pretty amazing, isn’t it? Considering all that and all the possible reasons why the others did not help, it’s quite a story.

It’s a story of going beyond the call of duty, of going out of your way to show compassion even to an enemy and that in doing so even the enemy becomes a neighbor.

³⁶ “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked.

And this man who wanted to test Jesus now has no other choice but to answer in a way that shows Jesus is right.

³⁷ The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” *He just couldn’t go so far as to actually say who he was – a Samaritan – but he knew all the same. The point was made.*

Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

I read a story this week in a journal titled *Christ in Pop Culture* about *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood* and it was timely, I thought considering all that’s happened in the last few days.

This is the story about a black man and Fred Rogers – the star of *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood* and a Presbyterian minister.

A Singing Police Officer¹

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, Francois Clemmons was the descendent of slaves and sharecroppers; but like many other blacks, his family moved north to the industrial mid-west and he grew up in Youngstown, Ohio. Clemmons remained deeply connected to his roots, though, both through the spirituals that his mother taught him and by cultivating his natural vocal talent in the church. Eventually, Clemmons pursued a career as an opera singer and was already touring when Rogers heard him perform at his home church in Pittsburgh. Soon after hearing him, Rogers invited Clemmons to appear in the Neighborhood—as a police officer.

“Fred came to me,” Clemmons recounts in a recent StoryCorps interview, “and said, ‘I have this idea...you could be a police officer.’ That kind of stopped me in my tracks. I grew up in the ghetto. I did not have a positive opinion of police officers. Policemen were sicking police dogs and water hoses on people. And I really had a hard time putting myself in that role. So I was not excited about being Officer Clemmons at all.”

But Rogers prevailed and Clemmons joined *MRN* in August 1968, only four months after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In doing so, Clemmons became the first African-American with a recurring role on a children’s television series. But as progressive as this was, Rogers decided to press social convention even further.

Episode 1065, which aired only a few months after Clemmons’ debut, opens in the typical manner with Rogers inviting viewers to be his neighbor; but instead of putting on his iconic cardigan, Rogers talks about how hot the day is and how nice it would be to put his feet in a pool of cold water. He moves to his front yard where he fills a small plastic pool with water and begins to soak his feet. Soon Officer Clemmons drops by for a visit and Mr. Rogers invites him to share the pool with him. Clemmons quickly accepts, rolls up his pant legs of his uniform, and places his very brown feet in the same water as Rogers’ very white feet.

Today, this small gesture may seem insignificant, but in 1969, it was considerable. Like public fountains, public transportation, and public schools, the public pool had become a battleground of racial segregation. Under Jim Crow era policy, not only could black and whites not swim at the same time, many pools were entirely off limits to blacks, fueled by a fear that African-Americans carried disease and the view that swimming pools were physically (and by extension sexually) intimate contexts. Like the lunch counter and public buses, swimming pools became a point of protest. Both black and white protestors staged wade-ins and swim-ins at beaches and community pools; but just like at sit-ins, local authorities responded with arrest and sometimes, physical violence. One iconic image from June 1964 shows a hotel manager dumping muriatic (Hydrochloric) acid in a pool of black and white bathers, while a young black woman clings to a white man screaming in terror.

¹ CAPC (Christ in Pop Culture), written by Hannah Anderson, March 24, 2016

But here in *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, only five years later, a quiet Presbyterian minister and an African-American police officer show the world how to integrate swimming pools. Rogers invites; Clemmons accepts.

As Clemmons slips his feet into the pool, the camera holds the shot for several seconds, as if to make the point clear: a pair of brown feet and a pair of white feet can share a swimming pool.

Nearly 25 years later Rogers and Clemmons reenacted this moment. A much older Rogers and Clemmons sit with their feet in a similar blue wading pool talking about the many different ways that children and adults say "I Love You"—from singing to cleaning up a room to drawing special pictures to making plays. As the scene ends, Rogers takes a towel and helps Clemmons dry his feet with a simple, "Here, let me help you."

Today, with so much fear, so much anger, such polarization among us all – in the U.S. and around the world, may we consider what it means for us to be a good neighbor; to step into that story Jesus tells and to be what Jesus himself would model for us.

The greatest commandment is to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor (regardless of who he/she is, or what color their skin is, or where they are from). Jesus illustrates for us a stepping out of our comfort zone and going the extra mile to care for others.

May we be about being a good neighbor and in doing so, modeling Christ for others.

Amen.

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