

July 14, 2019 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
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Being Neighbors in Complex Times

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

**Grace and peace, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**There is something wonderfully** appropriate about sitting outside this morning, facing our neighbors,  
and pondering this story of the Good Samaritan.

There is so much life that goes on, all around us, all the time.

Being outside gets us in proximity.

The Farmers Market has had that effect, hasn't it? And the pizza bakes, and bread oven work?

The Gardeners that we lift up this morning, they have a similar experience of being in the neighborhood.

We all do, in our own way, and yet we're never fully privy to what is going on for someone else.

**There's a set of quiet church steps on the 6<sup>th</sup> Street side of our building.**

These aren't the big front steps with their public face,

but rather these are just around the corner, a few steps up to a door that is rarely unlocked.

It's at that spot that I often notice folks sitting:

Is the teary eyed student stressed out with classes,

or in the throes of vocational discernment,

or breaking up with their significant,

or struggling mental health, or worried about their family?

Or maybe they aren't a student at all, but life is hard and they are feeling it,

and that quiet spot is sacred in that moment.

As much as I gauge a situation and gently check in when it seems appropriate, truth is, we never fully know  
another's shoes.

**So this morning, with that caveat, let's begin by thinking of our physical neighbors...whether you  
sleep in a house or an apartment, in a dorm or on the street:**

Close your eyes and picture your neighbors...

Do you know them by name? By car? By the dog they walk? By the way they keep house, or not?

Picture your interactions at their best...

Imagine your interactions at their worst...

Then, take a moment and simply observe our congregation's neighbors...

And finally, widen it out and picture in your mind's eye our nation's neighbors?

**Today's gospel begins with two sets of dialogue.**

The lawyer and Jesus are discussing the Torah: What must I do to inherit eternal life, the lawyer wonders. It's modern popular fundamentalism that gets us imagining some shiny heaven.

In Jesus' time, in Luke's theology, the lawyer is really asking a question about the fullness of life, and it turns out he already knows the answer, it's right there in the Torah:

“Love the Lord your God with all you heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength...and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Then, desperate for boundaries, for parameters, the lawyer presses further: But who is my neighbor?

**That's when Jesus tells his little powerful parable...** that explodes the whole thing,

That leaves us with the messy complexity of the world.

Sometimes we can see ourselves as the good Samaritan, that's nice.

The Samaritans of that time were Torah-followers, but religious and ethnic tensions between the Samaritans and others were ripe and sometimes even violent.

Other days, though, we pass right on by, like the Levite, like the priest, perhaps not noticing, probably more often making a conscious choice to avert our attention,

for good or for ill, for fear or for safety, for time or exhaustion, for other pressing demands.

Potentially we could be the bandits, in our own way, leaving another for dead.

Sometimes we're the inn keeper, asked to assist, empowered to offer mercy.

Other days we're the fellow in the ditch, completely vulnerable, desperate for compassion, any compassion.

Do you wonder how that fellow feels when he realizes it's a Samaritan who saved them?

**It's complex, isn't it?**

It's messy, and, truthfully, I believe that's exactly what Jesus and Luke intended.

The lawyer seeks boundaries, parameters, definition so he can do it right.

While I get weary of his self-serving questions, the truth is we all need boundaries, that's healthy.

Sometimes we'll stretch our boundaries, redefine the lines, and that seems to be Jesus' goal.

**We may find ourselves feeling the tension between charity and justice.**

Between this compassionate life where we take care of that one person who needs this or that...

Versus justice where we address the underlying questions: Why these robberies?

What could we change about the road?

What about the system?

Why do people hate this group or that?

**I can see plenty of temptation in today's reading:**

We're tempted to believe so strongly that we should always be the Good Samaritan, that we fail to notice ourselves in the other roles.

Or we're tempted to fixate on defining the boundaries of neighbor, drilling down, so we can get it right.

Or we're tempted to throw up our hands in anger or exhaustion, because the system is just so broken and the troubles are so immense.

**Let me offer two ways through this, both needed, both important:**

**The first gets at our questions:** Who is my neighbor? the lawyer asked, and we're quick echo.

Frankly, that's not the question Jesus wants us to ask.

Oh, it sounds good, it gets at our desire do the right thing.

The question to ask is this, **How do we act as a neighbor?**

**Take that one home today, chew on it: How do we act as a neighbor?**

**The second gets at our faith, our trust, really, at grace.**

In Jesus' time this parable would have rocked people's worlds.

All the dimensions of race and religion,

politics and parties, good and bad, violence and safety, trusted and not,

It's all in there then, and it's all in there now.

The Spirit guides us through these dimensions, through these complex times.

In Deuteronomy, there is a lovely line about the commandments: that they aren't too hard for you, and not too far away, but actually very close, in your mouth, in your heart.

There is grace here, dear ones, grace.

The Spirit will renew our energy, so we rest when we need to rest,

so we act and love and fight when that is the call.

**Listening to you, listen to the world,** listening to my own heart, it seems like something happened in the last week or two, we've gone over an edge.

Have you felt that?

I'm sure there are plenty of triggers, but for me it's in great part because of the immigration raids publicized to begin today.

In part of Florida, we're told that ICE has been going door to door, house to house, neighbor to neighbor.

Oh my.

We are living in a time (again) when people are being aggressively sorted.  
Sorted into neighbor and not neighbor.  
And frankly, it's a moral catastrophe.

**When I hear** Jesus' words this morning, there's no such thing as "not my neighbor".  
The rhetoric all around us is the language of genocide.

**In this time, in this fear, in this hatred, in this need,  
we are called to act, to live, to love, as neighbors.**

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all our soul, all our strength,  
and love your neighbor as yourself."

**As we sing, let this be our prayer**, a prayer of trust and grace, a prayer of courage in complexity:

When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus,

And when we're dying, it is in the Lord.

Both in our living and in our dying, we belong to God, we belong to God. Amen.