

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family
Title: Who Is Your Neighbor and Whose Neighbors Are You?
Lesson: Luke 10:25-37 NRSV

²⁵ An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

In a sermon two weeks ago, I told you that we had to think about who our neighbors are and that we should gradually expand the range of our neighbors. Have you ever thought about that? When you set the range of your neighbors, how did you do that? What was your standard? Could it be when you know their name? when you know their background how they grew up? When you know what their jobs are? When you know their parents and family? Could it be when you have a good relationship with them?

Today's gospel lesson is a parable of the Good Samaritan all of us know well.

(Slide 1) There was someone who was robbed. A priest and a Levite turned away from him as they passed by. The two had a legal obligation to take care of him after he met a robber, but they avoided the situation. However, the Samaritan, who was not legally obligated to see the situation, regarded it as his work and intervened deeply in the situation. His actions and participation were very specific.

First, the Samaritan took pity on the man who had been beaten by the robbers.

Also, the Samaritan approached him and poured oil and wine on his wounds, and bound them up.

Next, the Samaritan put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn, and took care of him all night.

Finally, he asked the innkeeper to continue caring for the man the next day, paying two denarii in advance and promised to repay the extra cost when he returns.

This is a story all of us know well. In fact, through this story, Jesus asked us a question, but we tend not to think of it as a question because we are too used to this story. But, Jesus spoke this parable to make us think about that question.

Jesus spoke the parable because a scribe asked of him, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” The scribe’s question was to discuss with Jesus a very fundamental question about eternal life, not to hear Jesus’ answer. The scribe asked the question to test Jesus.

Then Jesus answered his question with a question: “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” The scribe's question was abstract, but Jesus' question was specific. Then the scribe answered: “You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.” He told Jesus the right answer. As the scribe said, loving God and loving our neighbors are the summary and core of the Bible.

The scribe wanted to vindicate himself, so he asked Jesus again, “And who is my neighbor?” Because of this question, Jesus explained the parable of the good Samaritan I spoke of earlier. After telling the parable, Jesus asked: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The scribe wanted to continue discussing the range of his neighbor with Jesus, but Jesus was telling him through the parable of the good Samaritan how it would help them to discuss who his neighbor is.

Jesus' conclusion is that neighbors are never the subject of discussion. But Jesus is saying that being their neighbor is more important. So Jesus said: “Do likewise” (37).

(Slide 2) The apostle James suggests us to put Jesus' words into action more specifically in his letter: “Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:15-17)

Many Christians understand that faith is simply a confession of doctrine and confession by lips. Of course, confession of faith is very important. In the context of the early church, Christians were persecuted. In such a situation, it was not easy to just confess faith. However, things have changed a lot now. Christians are no longer persecuted. This change of circumstance requires Christians to demonstrate a more mature form of faith. It goes beyond a confession of faith in doctrine and calls for a concrete action of faith.

Let's imagine a romantic relationship. Imagine if a man only tells his partner that he loves her once a week, and doesn't spend time with her, doesn't give her gifts, nor write her letters. Can we say that he really loves her?

(Slide 3) According to Gustavo Gutierrez, he says, “Neighbor is not he whom I find in my path, but rather he in whose path I place myself, he whom I approach and actively seek.”

The parable of the Good Samaritan is too familiar to us, but it was a very shocking message to people at the time, because Jews considered Samaritans as evil and enemies. In other words, loving your neighbor means loving your enemies.

(Slide 4) Jesus is also asking us as well: “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

Who are your neighbors? And whose neighbors are you? If the question is difficult, who are our neighbors? Our neighbors are enemies we cannot love, those who weep in pain, those who suffer from disease, and those who need help because of poverty.

Jesus’ words are very specific. He taught us the word of God very concretely, rather than an abstract theory or concept. And he became the neighbor of the man who fell into the hands of robbers before anyone else.

When our church makes choices and decisions, I hope all of us would remember and obey Jesus’ words and ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?”

May the grace of the Lord always be with us, so that we all love Jesus and walk the path of discipleship as children of God who share in that love. Amen.