

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: Hospitality and Neighbors**

#### **Lesson: Luke 4:14-21**

*<sup>14</sup> Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. <sup>15</sup> He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. <sup>16</sup> He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

*<sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Have you ever heard the word *hospitality*? What comes to mind when you hear it? For me, the words *host* and *guest* immediately surface. I picture a host warmly welcoming and treating their guest with kindness. I also think of mutual trust and respect between them.

Hospitality, as a concept, can be understood as the right of every individual to be respected as a person and as the acceptance of a guest into our community as an equal member. Since we don’t frequently use the term *hospitality* in our daily lives, it may feel somewhat unfamiliar. To make it easier to understand, we might change it into a phrase like *love for neighbors*, which conveys a similar meaning in a way that’s easier to understand. You’re probably more familiar with the phrase *love for neighbors*, aren’t you? Compared to *hospitality*, it resonates with us more directly.

Even so, the phrase *love for neighbors* can still feel somewhat unclear. Who exactly are our neighbors? What does it mean, practically, to love them? These questions might feel unclear because each of us may hold slightly different

understandings of what *love for neighbors* entails. Similarly, we may have varied perspectives on the church, Christian living, faith, and even God.

Take the weather as an example. One person might see a day with a wind chill of -20°F as too cold to handle, choosing to stay indoors with a hot chocolate, while another might find it okay. Recently, I spoke with some friends in Southern California to check on them after the wildfires. During our conversation, they asked about the weather in Wisconsin. I told them it had snowed and the wind chill was about -10°F. They agreed January is a cold month. Curious, I asked about the temperature where they were, and they replied, “It’s cold here too—around 60°F.” I couldn’t help but laugh and said, “Hey, are you kidding? That’s summer weather here!”

This shows how we may each interpret situations differently. To truly understand what *love for neighbors* means, we need a clear standard. For Christians, that standard is the Bible and the life of Jesus Christ.

Around the age of 30, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, endured temptation in the wilderness, and returned to Galilee spiritually empowered. He went to Nazareth, where He had grown up, and on the Sabbath, read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

I’ve often pondered why Jesus chose this particular passage. I believe it was deliberate, revealing the purpose of His coming to earth.

At the time, people who were sick or disabled were kept out of the temple because of strict regulations. Forgiveness of sins required offering perfect bulls, goats, or lambs, or, for the poor, doves. However, many very poor individuals or foreigners couldn’t afford these offerings. As a result, they lived hopeless lives, feeling condemned and marginalized. The harshest burden they bore was the discrimination and scorn of others. Over time, the poor grew accustomed to this dehumanizing treatment, blaming themselves and resigning to despair.

Society at that time was riddled with issues. Exclusion and discrimination were justified using religious law. Not only the sick, poor, and disabled but also widows, orphans, and foreigners seeking hope were left out. They were denied respect and

inclusion within the community—there was no place for them where they were truly welcomed or embraced as neighbors.

When Jesus began His ministry, He read Isaiah 61 and declared, “*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*” This proclamation was a bold statement that He, the Son of God, had come to bring freedom to the oppressed, love to the unloved, and to welcome them as members of God’s kingdom.

This proclamation sets the standard for Christian hospitality and love for neighbors. Unlike worldly hospitality, where the guest seeks out the host, Jesus, as the host, came to us. Our salvation, then, is the result of His divine hospitality.

To be Christian means to follow the life of Jesus Christ. Hospitality, therefore, is not only our identity but also our attitude toward others.

I would like to emphasize four aspects regarding hospitality and love for our neighbors:

First, Jesus Christ showed us hospitality by coming to us.

Second, our salvation is the result of God's hospitality.

Third, hospitality is our identity.

Fourth, hospitality is the attitude Christians should have toward others.

So, friends, who are the ones we are called to show hospitality to today? Who are our neighbors? As Jesus Christ proclaimed, the poor, the sick, the disabled, the oppressed, the excluded, and prisoners are our neighbors.

I’ve also reflected more deeply on the idea of neighbors. I believe that while life on this earth may feel long, it is, in reality, incredibly short. Don’t you find yourself surprised when you look at photos from 10 or 15 years ago, realizing how much time has passed, even though it feels like just yesterday? Moments like these remind us how quickly time flies. I see our lives as a journey that begins with God and ultimately returns to God. In this sense, we are all sojourners, briefly passing through this world before returning to Him.

During this short life, everyone we encounter is our neighbor. Your parents, your siblings, your cousins, your spouse, your children, your friends, your church members, your community members, those who provide services for your convenience, those you see on the news experiencing disasters, those suffering from war, and all those in need—including the homeless, the addicted, and the abused—are our neighbors.

During the Christmas season, I witnessed our church helping a family through the "Christmas for Children" program. It was a young couple with two children. The church provided them with diapers and Christmas gifts. I was deeply moved by the church's kindness toward them. In times like these, when we hear so much sad news, I pray and hope for their safety and well-being.

Ah, I almost forgot to mention one important thing: you, too, are your own neighbor. Sometimes, there are people who are very generous to others but extremely harsh on themselves. I am one of those people. During my ordination process, I was required to take a psychological test. While interviewing with a psychologist, she pointed out that I had perfectionist tendencies. I couldn't deny it because I often blamed myself when things didn't go as planned or when I made mistakes. If any of you are like me, I encourage you to cherish and show hospitality to yourself, just as you do to others. You are precious.

Hospitality is our identity and attitude, but practicing it takes great courage, especially today. Welcoming and showing hospitality to neighbors isn't always as easy as it seems. At times, we may want to show hospitality, but fears about germs or anxiety about strangers can hold us back. The Bible tells us to "love your neighbor as yourself," and this command is neither "me first, you next," nor "you first, me next." Hospitality must be rooted in mutual respect. Therefore, it is important to practice love for our neighbors within healthy boundaries.

I believe it's better to do even the smallest act rather than doing nothing out of fear. Consider the parable of the talents: the servants who received five and two talents engaged in business with what they had and were successful. However, the servant who received one talent, afraid of losing it, buried it in the ground. When the master returned, was this servant praised or rebuked?

I think it's perfectly okay for our hospitality to begin with small actions, like speaking words of respect and acknowledgment to your spouse, family, and others, or offering a warm smile.

Through our acts of hospitality toward those we meet in life, our neighbors will witness the grace of God, and we, too, will see and feel God's love through the hospitality shown to us.