

Luke 10:25-37 ²⁵ And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading *of it?*" ²⁷ So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' " ²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." ²⁹ But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. ³¹ "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³ "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ "So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' ³⁶ "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" ³⁷ And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Many days growing up I watched on public television as Mr. Rogers came in his house, took off his dress shoes, placed on his slippers, changed his sweater, and sang with a smile on his face,

“It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood,

A beautiful day for a neighbor.

Would you be mine?

Could you be mine?

Won't you be my neighbor?”

I must admit that I never got any great life changing message out of this song as a kid. But this week, it came to mind again as I begin to study anew the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In our text, a lawyer approaches Jesus and asks Him the million dollar question. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Indeed, a good question worth much consideration. Jesus replies, “What is written in the law, how do you read it?” The lawyer had no trouble with this question. After all, he was a lawyer who studied the Law of God over and over again. The Torah, the Law was clear. The law was summarized in two commands, “Love God and love Neighbor.” Indeed, he had repeated these two summary points of the Law time and time again in the temple. Jesus agreed with his answer and replied, “Do this and you shall live.”

After all, the Old Testament Law called for the exact same things that the New Testament Scriptures call for in order to inherit eternal life. First and foremost, we are to fear, love, and trust in God. We are to have faith in Him and His marvelous ways of salvation. And secondly, that love we have for God is to be quite naturally

expressed in loving our neighbor. Faith in God and works that evidence that faith are indeed the way to eternal life. And so, Jesus encouraged him to do these things and live.

But this lawyer expressed his misunderstanding of the Law when he asked, “And who is my neighbor?” You see, this man did not understand that the Law was to lead to faith, and that faith was to lead good works. Rather, he sought to please God through his specific works. And since he wanted to inherit eternal life through his works, and not through faith in God, he needed to know exactly what to do. He asked, “Who is my neighbor?” in order to clarify what he was required to do and what he could refrain from doing and still make it through the pearly gates. Surely not everyone was his neighbor he asserted. He was sure that he had to love neighbors like those upstanding Jewish people he respected, but he was convinced that he was surely not required to love everyone. Who was his neighbor according to the law? He needed to know in order that he would be made right in God’s sight through his own works.

Jesus answered with a parable. A certain man was walking down the road. He was robbed, beaten and left for dead. A priest walked by, but passed on the other side. A Levite came down the same street, saw the man, and walked over to the other side of the street. Lastly, a man, a Samaritan of all people, saw the injured man. He went to him, bound up his wounds, placed him on his donkey and led him to an inn where he could get more help. He paid for the man’s stay, and promised to return to pay any additional bills the man would incur.

“Who was a neighbor to this man?” Jesus asked the lawyer. The lawyer had no choice but to answer, “The one who showed mercy to him.” Jesus repeated his original exhortation, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus changed the question on the lawyer. The Lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor? Jesus answered, “Who was a neighbor to this man?” In changing the question Jesus taught that the real question was not about defining who must be helped and who could not neglected, but rather the real question was what a man who loved God with all his heart looked like in action. A man who loves God, who has faith does not ask, “Who is my neighbor?” but rather begs with anyone in need as Mr. Rogers sang so sweetly, “Won’t you be my neighbor?” They are just looking for an opportunity to be neighbor to someone in need. The one who has

received the help of God is always looking for someone to make his neighbor in order that he might share the kind of help he has received so freely.

Put most simply, people who have been shown mercy by God show mercy to others. And, make no doubt about it, we are people that have been shown great mercy. For we were robbed of our health by sin, and were left for dead laying in a pool of our own unrighteous actions. Many would have passed us by convinced that we were not worth the trouble. But our Lord Jesus came down from heaven to where we were and helped us. He bound up and healed our wounds by taking those wounds into His own flesh. He carried the burden of our sin all the way to the cross. And arriving there at the cross, He assured the Father that He would pay the price required for the healing of those sins.

Jesus was a neighbor to each of us in the truest sense of all. He saw us in dreadful need, and took care of all of our needs without any cost to us. And the benefits of his neighborly love continue to come to us each time we gather in His house. They come each time we hear of His love from the Scriptures or in Absolution. They come each time we see His love bestowed upon a child at the font. And they come each time we receive His love into our mouths from His altar. Through these means, Jesus cries out time and time again to the entire world and to you and me “Won’t you be my neighbor?” as he invites everyone living a near dead world to receive his loving neighborly care. He begs of us that He might bestow his neighborly love upon us.

We must this day learn to ask this same question of our near dead world. As ones who have received the help of Jesus, we should have eyes that are just looking for someone to befriend, someone to be neighborly towards.

For, we must be careful. For it is much easier to try to define or identify our neighbors than to be neighborly to all. We can also decide like the lawyer that we will pick who we have been called to be neighborly towards. And when we do this, we often leave out those who most need a neighbor. We forget about those people whose houses we drive by each week that just need a friend, a neighbor who might introduce them to Jesus and His hope. Sure, it is easier to just be nice to those we know will be nice back to us or those that can be of some help to us in the future. But what we learn from Jesus is that we are called to be neighborly

precisely to those who have another to offer us in return. This is what grace is all about both as we have received it, and as we are blessed to give it away.

A couple weeks ago after we heard about our neighbor's death, many of you were caused to wonder if you drove by his house on the way to church while he was laying there dead. But perhaps the better question is how many people do we drive by each week that are laying half dead in their sin in desperate need of a neighbor to introduce them to Jesus.

For we who have been dead along the road and received God's care now are blessed to play the role of Good Samaritan wherever we find a person in need. We ask not, "Who is my neighbor?", but rather beseech all who are near dead in their sin "Won't you be my neighbor?" We beg of them that we might be a neighbor toward them. In Jesus' words, we go and do likewise. Amen.