

The Art of Neighboring: Serious about the Greatest Glen Elliott - October 29, 2017

Series Big Idea: Jesus wants to change the world. And his plan is simple and effective. It all starts with those close to us. Paul in Galatians 5:14 said: *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* Jesus gave us what is referred to as the Great Commandment - Love God with your all and love your neighbor as yourself. Everyone agrees! But to many it is just a nice thought and idea. It has now become cliché! The majority of the problems of our community could be drastically reduced and even eliminated if we became a community of great neighbors. Followers of Jesus should be light in their neighborhood! We should be different, not isolated, but engaging. Obeying this one command can change the world. That is our mission! The power of being a good neighbor is beyond what we can imagine. It is the plan of Jesus. Back to the basics!

Message Big Idea: Jesus said if we do this one thing we'll do all that God really wants of us. It is so big that we have given it the label of being "great" - the Great Commandment. We are to love God with all our being and love our neighbor as ourself. That's why our mission as a church is to love people to Jesus. We are to love where we live and work. That happens as we launch passionate people like you and me to our neighbors. In doing so we will make a difference in our community. We must be the light of Jesus to those near us and around us. If not us, then who?

Main Idea: Love...where you are.

Main Text: Matthew 22:34-40

Supporting Texts: 1 John 4:19-21; Matthew 7:12

Links: Halloween Challenge - mypantano.church

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think the American proverb "*Good fences make good neighbors*" means? How is this true and not true? Do you think Jesus would agree with this?
2. Jesus said the greatest of all commandments is to love God with your all and love your neighbor as yourself. Evaluate how well you are keeping the one great command. Specifically, describe how you are or are not loving your neighbors well.
3. Who are your "neighbors?" What does "neighbor" mean?
4. What does it mean in practical terms to love a neighbor as ourselves? How do you want to be treated? How can you translate that into how you treat others?
5. What is one concrete, specific, "measurable" thing you will do this week to love a neighbor (co-worker, contact, associate, etc.)?

Screen Information:

Slide1: All is fair in love and war.

Slide2: Time heals all wounds.

Slide3: You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Slide4: Good fences make good neighbors.

Video5: Car going into garage

Slide6: Matthew 22:34-40 (pg. 675)

Slide7: 1 John 4:19-21 (pg. 834)

Slide8: Love...where you are.

Slide9: Love...where you are.

Slide10: Love...where you are.

Slide11: Matthew 7:12 (pg. 661)

Slide12: Love...where you are.

Slide13: Halloween Challenge (URL?)

Slide14: Loving people to Jesus, launching passionate people to make a difference.

Slide15: Love...where you are.

Message:

There are all kinds of sayings that sound good and even wise, but in fact are lies or at least dangerous partial truths. I'll bet you know them. Let's try out a few and you fill in the blank...

- *All is fair in love and ___ (war)*. No! Doing things that are not nice or right just because you're in love is no justification for bad behavior. And Jesus challenges us to love our enemy!
- *Time heals all _____ (wounds)*. No it doesn't! If you don't address the wound, it will keep hurting you, often at times when you least expect it. Forgiveness does more to heal wounds than time.
- *You can't teach an old dog new _____ (tricks)*. Are you saying that older people can't change? That's not what God says! The power of the Gospel can change anyone!
- Finally, here's one of the great lies that comes from hell itself - *Good fences make good _____ (neighbors)*. The idea is that you keep people out of your lives to avoid conflict. And yes, there are some boundaries we need to set with people. And yes, some people are very challenging. But the fact is that the best neighbors engage with each other.

Our culture has taken this idea and we build houses to enshrine this principle. Let me show you! **[Video of car going into garage]** We come home, open the garage door without getting out of their car, and drive inside, if our garage is not full. We just.... disappear. The garage swallows us up! The result, intended or not, is that we avoid making contact with our neighbors. I have neighbors that I have a very hard time connecting with because because I never see them.

And we all have air conditioners now which is a lifesaver in Arizona. But the cost is that

we almost never sit out front anymore and meet our neighbors. We are a culture that encourages in almost every way to be more and more isolated. As good as all the new and varied technologies are, they tend to isolate us from each other. We live in a new world that is intentionally designed to isolate us and damage relationships. Wow, that is a whole separate teaching. While I don't want to get off track, let me address our online folks.

Our new technologies allow about 300 of you to join us digitally each week. We are so glad you can join us. Some of you are physically away on business, vacation or are deployed. Some of you are not feeling well but didn't want to miss church. For some it was just easier today to watch online. Some of you are checking us out online and it is a lot safer to do so this way than actually visit. I'm really glad you have joined us. But here's the challenge. Online is great for so many situations. But it is not intended to be a permanent replacement for sharing life together. We need to physically engage with each other face to face, side by side as we live, grow and serve. Proximity matters when it comes to being really loved and cared for and being able to love and care for others. That's what real church is about. If you are with us online, we hope that you'll join us when you are able or our online host will be glad to help you find a church near where you are.

Now, let me go back to talking about our actual neighbors. Neighbors are the people we live in proximity with. Let me ask you a question. Do you really know your neighbors? Do you know their names? Do you know what's really going on with them? There are people who live right around us who are struggling and hurting. In your apartment complex or neighborhood there is an older person who has been forgotten by their family and struggling to make it on their own. There are single moms struggling to balance supporting their kids, investing in them, taking care of the house, apartment and car and having some time to just rest. There are people who have serious and even terminal illnesses that have made their life almost unbearable. There is a child or an adult who is the victim of some kind of ongoing abuse or other unhealthy relationships. And there are lots of lonely and hurting people within a short walk from our front doors.

Solutions to the needs in our neighborhoods are not found in the government, the police, our schools or neighborhood associations (if you have one). They are invaluable and necessary, but they are not designed to fix all the problems around you. The majority of the problems of our community could be drastically reduced and even eliminated if we became a community of great neighbors. The power of a good neighbor is beyond what we can imagine. And in fact that was the plan of Jesus. Jesus commands that we be good neighbors first and foremost. We, as followers of Jesus, should be different - not isolated from those around us, but engaging. Jesus commands us to be great neighbors!

Do you realize that Jesus thinks being a great neighbor is one of the most important things we can do? True spirituality must include this - being a great neighbor! Today we are beginning a new series called *The Art of Neighboring*. For a few weeks we are

going to look at what Jesus says about the art of neighboring. I think you'll be surprised at what a big deal this is for Jesus and why it becomes one of his greatest and strongest commandments.

Today we'll look at one of those specific commands. It was near the end of Jesus' life on earth when the conflict with the religious leaders was intensifying. In fact the religious leaders were ganging up on him trying to trap him so they could bring him down. They wanted to catch him say something that they could twist and claim was a violation of their religious law and use to actually sentence him to death by their religious court.

So we pick up the story just after Jesus had avoided being trapped by one group of Jewish leaders when another group, called the Pharisees, would try a different tactic. It was tag-team attack on Jesus. We pick up the story in Matthew 22:34-40 (pg. 675 -NIV) - **34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"** They wanted to discredit Jesus. Maybe Jesus would make a blunder and say something that clearly is wrong. They knew he often said things contrary to the religious establishment so this could be a "gotcha" moment.

But Jesus knows the Torah, the law, and quotes it in verses 37-40...**37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'** (He's quoting Deuteronomy 6:5) **38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'** (He's quoting Leviticus 19:18) **40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."** Jesus takes two commands in the Torah or Law and basically combines them into one command which we call the Great Commandment! Love God with your all and then he says you are to love your neighbor as you love yourself. There is NOTHING more important...according to Jesus.

Jesus said loving our neighbor is similar to loving God! Love God - the greatest command. But there's also one like it and connected intimately with it - love your neighbor. You can't love God and not love others. If we truly love God, we will love our neighbor.

Now, hold on here. Is Jesus really saying that if I don't love my neighbor, then I really am not loving God? Yes! The apostle John reminds us of this in 1 John 4:19-21 (pg. 834 - NIV) - **19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.** Folks, I teach God's Word not to beat you up. I teach God's Word because I want you to know the truth. It is the real truth that will set you free and set you up for the best life possible. And I don't want you to be surprised on the day you meet God face to face. So we have to get this and get it right. You can't say you love God

and then not love your neighbor. Period. They are connected. Don't fool yourself. Jon Acuff says it this way; *"The first church a neighbor visits is your driveway. You don't get to be a good at church and be a bad neighbor!"* The two are connected because they are connected! It is wrong, it is hypocritical, to say we love God and then not love others. God loves us and we love God. God's love in us. His love flows through us.

But here how tricky spirituality can be. Here's how we fool ourselves. When a follower of Jesus reads or quotes the Great Commandment, we all agree with it! We say "Yes!" We love the simplicity of what Jesus is teaching. We agree that love is the most important thing. No one then and no one now can refute what Jesus said. And the devil knows that. So here's how the devil tricks us. He'll get us just to think of this statement of Jesus as just a nice thought, a nice idea. It is so familiar to many of us that we take it for granted. And then we don't actually do it! We are experts at not taking the Great Commandment seriously!

But Jesus wasn't just winning an argument with the religious leaders. He wants us to take this command seriously. He wants us to take the Great Commandment literally. The point Jesus is trying to make is simple and powerful - **Love...where you are.** To love God means to also love our neighbor. Our neighbor is anyone where we live or work or come in contact with. Our neighbor is anyone who is in physical proximity to us. We are to love those around us, wherever we are. You and I are to love the neighbor whose dog poops in your yard every day while taking their daily walk. And everyday they fail to pick up the mess. We are to love the neighbor who plays loud music, drops the f-bomb all the time and doesn't remove the weeds from their front yard. I'm not saying those are okay things neighbors to do to each other. But Jesus didn't say just love the neighbors that you like.

Love...where you are. How do you hear this? You might hear it in one of two ways. Some of us might hear this as: love the place where you physically live - your house, apartment, workplace. And some of us heard this as: love the people wherever you happen to live. I mean both! Both are connected. When we really invest in the people where we physically live that is how we love our neighbor. Loving your neighbor isn't just about an address. Where we live includes where we work, play and go to school too. It's the regular client, customer, student or employee we see. It is our co-workers, literal neighbors at work or school. It is all about the people wherever you live.

Love...where you are.

Jesus told us how we are to love our neighbor. He said we are to love others like we love ourselves. This is a troubling qualifier. What does he mean here? First, many of us are not very good at loving ourselves. Right?! Yes, we all, at times, and some of us right now or too often dislike things about ourselves. Some of us live with shame and regret. Some of us are very disappointed for the decisions we made, the lifestyle we chose and habits in our lives.

Jesus knows that. That's why Jesus loves us so deeply. He wants the very best for us. He forgives us in our failures and messes. In our shame, regret, failure which tempts us not to love ourselves, there is Jesus who always loves us and will never stop loving us. And that is why we connect as the church; to love each other and help each other. If you are stuck in disliking yourself - reach out. Online, talk to your host. If you are here, we have all kinds of ways to connect with you and help. Go over to Launching Point, Room #3 after service.

Even if you are having trouble loving yourself right now, the fact is we know how we want to be loved. And that's what Jesus is talking about. We know how we want to be loved! We want to be noticed. We want to be taken seriously. We want to be respected and trusted. We want to be cared for and affirmed. We want to be valued with time and attention. How we want to be loved is how we love our neighbors. That is what Jesus said in Matthew 7:12. We call this verse the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is the same as the Great Commandment. Let's see if I'm not right. Turn to Matthew 7:12 (pg. 661 - NIV) - ***So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*** How do you love your neighbor as yourself? Do unto others how you would want them to treat you! We all want to be loved, listened to, treated well, given the benefit of the doubt, cherished and so on. So that is how we are to be a neighbor to others. Notice again that all the laws of the Bible are summarized by this idea. Treat others as you want to be treated. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love...where you are.

But here's the sad reality. We don't even know the names of most of our neighbors. So how can we even begin to love them well? We are so isolated from our neighbors, co-workers and others that we don't engage with them. How will we ever be able to do the one great commandment? Further, we are so busy we don't have time for our neighbors. Some of us are introverts and when we get home all we want to do is hibernate to charge our batteries that were drained throughout the day. We don't create margins in our lives to make room for loving our neighbors. Some of us are just afraid to get involved with others and the messes in their lives.

And according to Jesus, that's not okay. We have to get serious about this. We can mess up in lots of ways, but we have to really take the Great Commandment seriously and literally. In fact if we do this, we'll actually address most of what God wants us to do and become the people he wants us to be like. ALL the laws and commandments of God are summed up in this - Love God and love your neighbor!

Here's what it looks like. A short while ago I saw that my neighbor needed help with some yard work. It was the kind of work that would be very difficult for her since she has a bad back. So I spent a good part of a holiday helping her. She sent me a thank you note and finished it with this: "I so grateful to have the best neighbors one could ever hope for." We all can do things like that. Let me share some ways we can be good neighbors...

1. Take the initiative and meet a neighbor. Just go up to their door, introduce yourself and just say; "I'm new or I've lived here for X years and I realized I don't even know your name! I'm ____, what's your name? Glad to meet you!" You could take a homemade dessert as well. Who knows what kind of a conversation that might lead to.
2. Look for a way to help your neighbor with some landscaping project, moving something, fixing a car or whatever. If you are looking, you'll find ways to connect.
3. Finally, Halloween is in a couple of days. It is not too late to try our Halloween Challenge. Go to our new website called MyPantano for ideas. **[Slide mypantano.church]** Some families or small groups will grill hot dogs or give out free water and just engage with the neighborhood. You'll be surprised at the connections and conversations you can have.

Pick a way to connect with a neighbor or co-worker. Pick a person and figure out how you can love them in a way that's not creepy! What is crazy is how simple the command of Jesus is! He gave one great commandment that if we all obeyed it would change the world. The fact is that is our mission! Our mission is what we will do - no matter what. Our mission here at Pantano is: "**Loving people to Jesus, launching passionate people to make the world different.**" It is time each and everyone of us take the Great Commandment seriously and actually do it. Let me challenge you to pray for one person - one neighbor - someone you live by, work with, have some consistent connection with. We have these bracelets to remind us. They are out at guest services in the courtyard. Pray for one so you can love the one. Who will be the neighbor that you love like you want to be loved? **Love...where you are.** Please stand. As we sing this final song, think about your one and commit to loving your neighbor.

Song: For The One (Bethel)