

Loving My Neighbor
2019 First Responders Sunday
Lester Zimmerman
Matthew 22:34-40

For my message this morning I would like to read from Matthew 22. In this passage Jesus' enemies were trying to trap him with their religious questions. Jesus knew their intentions, so he not only answers their question with great wisdom but also goes to the heart of the matter.

Matt 22:34-40 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Jesus wraps the whole teaching of the Bible into two thoughts. **Love God with your whole being and love your neighbor as yourself**. This morning I want to focus on the part of loving our neighbor as our self.

First, we need to answer the question, "**Who is my neighbor?**" According to Jesus.....

1. Every person I encounter is my neighbor.

It's not just the people who live next door but those you encounter throughout your day. It is those who you have opportunity to touch with God's kindness. Every type of person, everywhere you go.

To drive home the point of who our neighbor is Jesus told the **story of the Good Samaritan** who stopped along the road to help a stranger. A stranger that was biased against him but who was in need. This is Jesus definition of a neighbor.

- Everyone we meet and everyone in need is our neighbor

For first responders it is those who call for help. We respond no matter who they are. All we need is their address or location and we go to help them. They are the neighbors Jesus talked about.

The second question we need to ask is **“What does Jesus mean when he tells me to love them as I love myself?”**

He answers this in **Matthew 7:12** Jesus explains it this way....

“In everything you do, be careful to treat others in the same way you’d want them to treat you, for that is the essence of all the teachings of the Law and the Prophets.”

This has come to be known as the **Golden Rule**. The rule Jesus asks all his followers to live by. So, this means.....

2. We are to treat people the same way we would want to be treated if we were in their shoes.

Step in the shoes of the mom in the grocery store and your child is throwing a tantrum. How would you want people to respond to you? *Irritation/Sympathy*

Step in the shoes of the driver going slow because you are lost, or elderly. How would you want the driver behind you to respond? *Horn/Patience*

What if you had a disability? How would you want to be treated?

What if you had a spouse who was in prison or recently passed away?

How about stepping into the shoes of a person struggling with an addiction.

Jesus is saying – try to put yourself in the shoes of that person you tend to judge or avoid or get upset with.

Thankfully I see many people trying to follow the golden rule.

I see nurses and nurses’ aides treating the elderly with dementia with dignity.

I have witnessed first responders treating people with dignity who needed help because of substance abuse. Not always easy.

It is also helpful to remember how God loves and treats me. He has a lot of patience with me. When I see God’s grace at work in my life it is easier to extend grace to others.

God reached out to me when I was hopelessly lost and undeserving.

Psalm 40:2 He stooped down to lift me out of danger from the desolate pit I was in, out of the muddy mess I had fallen into. Now he's lifted me up into a firm, secure place and steadied me while I walk along his ascending path. (TPT)

Something we say around here is that **"we are all broken"**. We are all in need of a savior. We all need Jesus to come as our first responder and lift us out of our pit.

I read this about a man who fell into a pit and couldn't get out.

A sensitive person came along and said, "I feel for you down there."

A know it all said, "If you had been more careful you wouldn't be in the pit"

Another person said "If you just try hard enough you should be able to get out of your pit.

A self-righteous person said, "Only bad people fall into a pit."

The county inspector said, "Did you have a permit to dig that pit?"

A self-pitying person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit!"

An optimist said, "Things could be worse."

A pessimist said, "Things are going to get worse."

But Jesus saw the man in the pit, reached down and lifted him out.

Jesus stops by each person's pit and reaches down. Even though it was our own behavior that got us into the pit in the first place. Which brings me to my last truth.

3. We are all undeserving of God's kindness and forgiveness.

While we were still in our sins, God reached out to us. God didn't wait for us to clean up our lives. He accepts us as we are and then helps us grow.

Romans 5:8 But Christ proved God's passionate love for us by dying in our place while we were still lost and ungodly! (TPT)

We are called to love the people around us in the same way. We may feel they are undeserving and even repulsive at times, but we are still called to treat people with respect and dignity.

We become more compassionate with others when we understand our own unworthiness.

We become more loving when we realize how great a love, we have received through Christ dying on the cross for our sins.

It then becomes easier to love your neighbor who seems unlovable and undeserving and irritating with the loud music and barking dog.

I know we can put on our professional hat and badge and treat people with dignity because it is the professional thing to do, which is good. **But there is a love and compassion that goes deeper than professionalism** that causes people to experience God's love flowing through us.

It's good to remember the saying - **“There but for the grace of God, go I.”**

Conclusion:

For those of us here this morning and those watching online I would ask – have you said yes to Jesus and his plan for your life **or are you still trying to dig your way out of your pit in your own strength? Like someone trapped in a burning car, we can't save ourselves. We all need a savior.**

How are you doing at loving God with all your heart and others as yourself?
We need God to help us do both things. We can't do it very well on our own.

After the service we have prayer ministers that will be at the side of the sanctuary ready to pray with you and help you take hold of the hand Jesus extends to you in offering his forgiveness and salvation. We also gladly pray for any needs you might have.

Again, thank you to all the First Responders who are here and to those watching online. We do sincerely honor you today and every day. You are a blessing to our community.

Blessing Prayer: All Stand - Chaplain Mark Malizzi

Mark is the Executive Director of Thunder Outreach Ministries.

- He is the Chaplain of the Boyertown Area Fire and Rescue team in Boyertown Pa.
- He is also the Chaplain of the “Blue Knights” International Law Enforcement motorcycle club in Berks County regions of Pa.