

Sermon

Neighborliness

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, July 10, 2022

5th Sunday After Pentecost

Ex. 20:1 Then God spoke all these words:

Ex. 20:2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before me.

Ex. 20:4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, 6 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Ex. 20:7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Ex. 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Ex. 20:12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Ex. 20:13 You shall not murder.

Ex. 20:14 You shall not commit adultery.

Ex. 20:15 You shall not steal.

Ex. 20:16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Ex. 20:17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Luke 10:25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. a "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."

Luke 10:29 But wanting to justify 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 went away, 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 near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. 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."

- I. Remember with me a moment . . . remember when we were in Egypt.**
- A. When, we were trapped in a place where**
- † all the money and
 - † all the political influence
 - † all the police and military power
where administered from the top of the pyramid.
- B. A place where:**
- † people were used up and discarded
 - * Because those at the top thought them expendable
 - † where the marginal were abused
 - * because there was no justice for the poor
 - † where all voice of opposition was silenced
 - † where every form of brutality was justified by the demand for more bricks . . .
- C. We groaned under our bondage in such a society**
- † we cried out in pain and distress
 - † we wept for the hopelessness of it all
- D. And the Lord heard our cry and remembered us**
- † delivered us from bondage
 - † led us into escape by way of the wilderness
- E. We are a people *deeply shaped by this* memory and *this* narrative which for many thousands of years we have been teaching to our children.**
- F. Before long we found ourselves at Sinai . . . at the foot of a great and terrible mountain and a Lord who was ready to offer us an alternative to the**

nightmare from which we had been rescued. He said:

Ex. 19:5 Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6 but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”

G. Then the God of Sinai got down to the details:

† **no other gods**

† **no idols**

† **no misuse of God’s name**

(all the rest about maintenance of neighborliness)

† **sabbath — rest, you and your neighbors**

† **honor your parents**

† **no killing neighbor**

† **no adultery with neighbor**

† **no stealing from neighbor**

† **no lying about neighbor in court**

† **no acquisitive envy — no coveting your neighbor’s stuff!**

With the deathly experience of Egypt still fresh in our memory — we promised to follow in God’s new way!

II. Fast forward a few thousand years

A. Jesus is preaching, teaching, healing, and practicing neighborliness . . . when he is approached by someone who knows well the instructions given at Sinai.

Luke 10:25 Just then a lawyer 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.”

- B. This wise young man knows that it’s about the love of God expressed by love of the neighbor!**
- C. And we who are the “Greek chorus” in this scene look on in adoration and exclaim “Awww!”**
- D. But then this wise young lawyer asks the question which has haunted the hearts of people of faith since the law was given at Sinai . . .**

“Who is my neighbor?”

- E. To whom, exactly, do I have this obligation of love?**

III. And then Jesus tells us his story . . .

- A. About a man strange to us - a Samaritan**
- B. Who had things to do . . . but was compassionate in the face of someone in need.**
- C. Who took upon himself the care of someone strange to him.**
- D. Who put himself in financial peril by agreeing to pay unspecified room / board / & medical bills.**
- E. Who, for all his kindness and mercy remained nameless.**
- F. HE, Jesus concludes, is the definition of “neighbor.”**

† And he is the one worthy to be emulated.

IV. Fast forward a few thousand years . . . and here we sit.

- A. With the memory of Sinai fresh in our minds**
- B. With the parable of Jesus ringing in our ears**

C. We, too, must wrestle honestly with “Who is my neighbor?”

† **How far will our generosity and mercy extend?**

† **Which of those people strange to us will fall within the arc of our circle of care?**

D. I cannot tell you who your neighbors are — that is a question each person of faith must answer for themselves.

† **But it is worth noting that Jesus was neighborly to:**

* **frightened and unfaithful disciples**

* **tax collectors**

* **sinners**

* **the poor**

* **the infirm**

* **the untouchables of every kind.**

† **And it is worth observing that the Samaritan, whose neighborliness so impressed Jesus, appeared to go about his kind care without making it about himself. As I mentioned he isn’t even remembered by name.**

* **That puts me in mind of a favorite poem by William Wordsworth:**

Lines Composed Above Tintern Abbey

“...that best portion of a good [person’s] life, the little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.”

V. In a few minutes we will commission our ASP service-team

- A. Each year for many years we have loaded up the bus and cars too with kind-hearted and hard-working people who will go where they are strangers to help address the needs of people who (at least to begin with) are strangers to them too.**
- B. Our ASP team members, like the Samaritan in Jesus' parable:**
- † **Have *other things* they might have done this week — but they have taken vacation time to go and help as they are able.**
 - † **They will engage in a ministry of compassion to people who need repairs to homes but have no resources to pay for those repairs.**
 - † **Part of the ministry will be accomplished with hammers and drills and nails and aching muscles and sweating brows...**
 - † **Perhaps and even more important ministry will take place in conversations over a cup of water, or moments of laughter at day's end.**
- C. Let those of us who will remain in Cary “go and do likewise,” and we think about our ASP team this week.**

Charge:

*It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood
A beautiful day for a neighbor
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?*

[Verse 2]

It's a neighborly day in this beautywood

*A neighborly day for a beauty
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?*

*[Bridge]
I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you*

*[Verse 3]
So let's make the most of this beautiful day
Since we're together, we might as well say
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?
Won't you be my neighbor? — Fred Rogers*