

*The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Neighbor*  
*By Jason Huff*  
*March 31, 2019*  
*Luke 10:25-37*

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Luke 10:25-37. May God add His blessing on the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Sometimes change is good. We’ll return to our study of the book of Acts shortly after Easter. But with Easter coming and with all that’s been happening in our lives and in the life of the congregation, I want us to once again spend time at Jesus’ feet, learning from His teachings and His life. The book of Acts is inspired and useful – we’ve learned a lot – but for the time being, I know I need to go right back to the source of our being, our Lord and Savior, as we head into Easter. We’ll listen to some of Jesus’ teachings and see where we can be found in them.

And today’s story is among the most well-known Jesus ever told. People who’ve never ever heard of Samaritans know what a “good Samaritan” is – someone who’s not obligated to help another person in need but does so anyway. The way Luke skillfully sets up this parable from Jesus, there are lots of angles you can discuss. Today, I want us to see it leading us to be neighbors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

I want to start today by telling you about a couple great neighbors – Buck and Jolene Smith. They were introduced to me some 25 years ago as Uncle Buck and Aunt Jolene, and for a while I wasn’t sure if they were related to anybody in the family or not. They were the next-door neighbors to the Cofields for 45 years. Catha’s earliest memories include them, playing with Jolene and their sons, summer afternoons in a backyard pool. Buck and Jolene were good friends, sharing meals and stories, joys and heartaches, 45 years worth.

They watched out for Katie when Catha's dad Mal passed away thirteen years ago. And Jolene was the first person on the scene when Catha knew something was really wrong last week. We can be here today without worries because they're watching over the house in Indiana. They are the epitome of good neighbors. What's striking is that they stayed in the same place for so long, and that they kept up their relationship with Catha's mom and dad, even though they didn't attend the same church or even belong to the same generation. The art of being a neighbor has been lost in modern America. I believe it is time for Christians to reclaim it. I want to look at what Jesus says about being a neighbor, the state of the world today, and how we might become true neighbors according to Jesus.

So in Luke 10, an expert in the law asks Jesus about eternal life. Now Jesus doesn't say, "Believe in me and you'll have it." He's still helping His people understand that it is impossible to fully keep the Law and find salvation in it. He asks the man to tell Him what he thinks the Law says. And this guy truly is an expert; he knows the right answer. He goes right for the summary the Law gives itself – "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus complements him. You got it right! Do that, and you'll have eternal life! Now keep in mind that it is truly impossible to love God this way and love your neighbor as yourself. It's a clue that the Law is harder than we think. But at the same time, it's the core of Christianity behavior as well. We gain salvation through faith in Jesus, and that faith motivates us to want to love God and our neighbor completely.

But this lawyer wants to justify himself. We get it; we try to justify our actions all the time. "Why did you get two apple pies at McDonalds?" "Because they asked me if I wanted them and I didn't say no." (Real excuse!) I didn't get a C on the test because I didn't study; it was unfair! This guy wants to justify what he does; he wants to know that the way he loves his neighbor is good enough to earn a spot in God's Kingdom. He wants to get to the pearly gates and say, "You know, Jesus said I was OK because I loved my neighbor this much."

But Jesus doesn't let us get away with anything. You think you know what being good is? Let's take it up a notch. You either come into the Kingdom by faith or not at all. So Jesus skips the question entirely and moves to the bigger one: who's a good neighbor? There's a man beaten and left for dead by robbers on the road to Jericho – a route notorious even today for hidden caves and passages that can make travel dangerous.

Two men come along and see the man dying on the side of the road. One's a priest and the other is a Levite. In ancient Judaism, there are no people holier than these two. The priest is authorized to make sacrifices to God at the temple. He stands before God day after day and, through the animal sacrifices, atones for the sins of the people. He is a Levite, and only Levites had permission from God to serve in the temple and to become priests. These were highly honored men, and both of them pass the guy up...act as if he wasn't even there. They do *nothing* for him. Scripture doesn't tell us why directly. But I'm going to read between the lines and find the three things that I think are behind this, the reasons so clear in the ancient Jewish context that you can't deny them.

The first issue is fear. Stopping on this particular road to help a hurt man was genuinely dangerous – it could have even been a trap for these bandits to do the same thing to them. The second issue is cost...not just money but in lost time. In stopping to help the man, there's some cost involved in bandages, oil and wine (used to fight infection), not to mention if they were to do what the Samaritan does and pay for his recuperation. But they also could lose time if the man were to die in their care. Under the Law, a person who came into contact with a dead body became unclean for seven days. That was seven days out of service, out of work.

And both of these contribute to the final factor...hassle. Taking care of this fallen man by the side of the road is a pain. It's messy, it's tiresome, not what they had planned, they are very important people, loyal followers of God making sure the people can worship properly, surely this isn't their responsibility. We're talking about a dying man here, and yet if we're all honest, taking into account the danger and fear, the cost, the hassle, would we have done otherwise?

Then there's the Samaritan that cares for the man – not only treating him, but putting him on his donkey, meaning he's walking, going much slower than anticipated through dangerous territory. He stops at an inn, taking care of him at least one day, then paying for the innkeeper to do so until he returns with more money to cover the extra expenses. There's nothing he doesn't do to make sure that as far as it depends on him, the wounded man will get better.

Why a Samaritan? The Samaritans were a Jewish cult – they had a corrupted version of the first five books of the Bible, a different place of worship, and a belief that only they had the faith right. They had extremely strained relationships with the Jewish people which sometimes led to violence, and the Jewish people despised them even more than the pagans. If Jesus were to tell the story today, it wouldn't be hard to see Him placing a Muslim as the noble character.

What was the point? I think there are two ideas at play. One is that everyone, no matter who they are, is our neighbor. Everyone can be our neighbor because everyone, no matter how far they've strayed from God or His ways, is made in God's image. No matter where they come from in the world, what race or creed or color or faith system, we do more than tolerate them – we love them because God's indelible fingerprints are on them.

The second idea is that we are called to a greater standard as Christians to love every neighbor with deep compassion that defeats fear, cost, and hassle. A core point of the story is that a Samaritan – a despised outsider whose ideas about God were squirrely at best and whose racial and ethnic background was suspect – not only could do the right thing, but would do it when more “godly” people would shrink back.

The people with all the biblical knowledge failed the test; all their learning didn't do them any good when it came to doing the godly thing. The Samaritan didn't worship God as he should have; he was ignorant about a lot of things. But he loved his neighbor as himself despite the cost. We who have the fullness of God's revelation, who know Jesus as our Savior and Lord, who have all the Scripture, who know the love God has shown us in saving us through our sins...surely we cannot do any less.

So what about being a 21<sup>st</sup> century neighbor? First off, I want to say that we are so thankful for you as a congregation for being good neighbors to us. We've had a nasty 2019 so far, and the ways you've blessed us through it have been awesome. In the midst of all we have had to do (and still have to accomplish), your gifts mean so much to us. Not having to worry about meals when we are just trying to get back on our feet is a huge gift. Many of you have texted us and been in touch with Catha since the loss of Katie, and that's a big blessing. How you have cared for us shows that CrossWay is on firm footing to become a neighborly church.

But that's also my jumping off point to launch into the unknown world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century neighbor. You see, the reason that Jesus was so insistent on expanding our view of our neighbors was because in His day, the Jews only saw other Jews as neighbors. In fact, the ancient Jewish group called the Essenes, who prized holiness, taught that only other holy Jews were their neighbors – not Jews at large, and definitely not sinful Jews. Not to mention that other racial and ethnic and religious groups usually did not live next door. Jesus was expanding their horizons. He was showing them that He was going to bring people into God's Kingdom even from groups they hated, through His forgiveness shown through His sacrifice on the cross.

Being a 21<sup>st</sup> century neighbor as a faithful Christian is going to become more and more countercultural. Because being a neighbor in modern America is different than virtually any other time and place in history. It used to be that you needed your neighbors for all sorts of things. Security when you were out of town, another pair of eyes on your kids. Some flour or salt or sugar when you ran low. Someone to trade your homegrown vegetables with, your livestock with. Most of what you consumed came from your neighbors, and you also made or grew something they needed or wanted. You acted neighborly because the village was what you had – that guy down the street you didn't like very much had a statistical chance of becoming your brother-in-law one day. Neighbors shared the joys and heartaches of the community.

Now, people don't see the need for neighbors. Security is provided by ADT, and the kids stay at home playing video games and watching YouTube. The store is a five-minute drive away, and they have foods from around the world – no need to trade with someone who happens to live next door. With the Internet, you can find your community, whether it's boating enthusiasts or board gamers or photographers or people who think the same way you do about God. You can spend your free time hanging out with them. And because our communities have such a wide variety of people – not only racially and ethnically, but spiritually, politically, different likes and dislikes – it's easier to find a group of people we feel we "fit with" rather than to try and make something work with the people who bought a home nearby.

You know what? It is OK to be a part of affinity groups of people like us. Why? Because it gives us more people to have the opportunity to be a neighbor to. So many people are joining affinity groups, groups of people like them with similar interests, because there is a desperate need for community. That need that was once met through the church, once people left faith behind, they still needed community, God still made them for community, and so they're trying to find it. To be a 21<sup>st</sup> Christian neighbor means not expecting people to come to church for their community, but going to them where they are at.

So find something that fits your personality. Join the ice fishing group or the International Academy parents' group or Video Gamers Anonymous. But I invite you not to do it just so you enjoy the people and have a good time. You're there to show Christ to the group, to have their backs, to be a neighbor, to show them in their time of need that you are there for them. They may not do the same in return, and that's OK. You're there to show what it means to be a Christian neighbor, expecting nothing – because you have Christ as your Savior, the church has *your* back, and God has made you to relate to those folks in ways others might not.

But I also think it would be wise to be neighbors in the neighborhood again. Because it's now countercultural, because it's not necessary or expected, it's even more like the good Samaritan. He didn't have to help anybody; in fact, he was the least likely person to help a Jewish man beat up along a dangerous road. So it should be in our neighborhoods. We who trust in Christ should know who lives next door and be there for them – not because we have to, not because we expect anything in return, but because the way we are to live as Christians is summed up as loving God and loving our neighbors.

Let's go back to the things that made the priest and Levite pass on by: fear, cost, and hassle. They are part of why we don't act neighborly. Fear – we worry about danger; the news loves to rub our faces in danger. Maybe we will put ourselves in danger reaching out to people on our block. But far more often, making a casserole or raking some leaves or watching a child in a crisis will win us points, not get us into trouble. And biblically, just because loving our neighbor can be dangerous doesn't exempt us from doing it.

Cost – that's a tougher one. We don't have a lot of time or cash. It's hard to imagine finding another hour to fix the neighbor boy's bike or tend the widow's garden when she's in the hospital. When we're already tapped out, an extra \$100 to get someone's daughter to camp or to cover someone's co-payment is rough. But God owns everything in all creation, and He can provide what we need to be good neighbors. One blessing for us is learning just how many little things Katie funded – like buying palms for Palm Sunday when her home church's budget was too tight. You might count the cost now, but God will use those gifts to bless people spiritually.

Hassle...hands down, this is the one that will kill us. Am I right? More than anything, it's just work. Can't I just sit at home and binge Netflix? Dive into that book I've been working on? Ooo, I'll even sweeten the pot a bit and read my Bible. Nope! Doesn't work! Priest and levite, they passed on by, but they didn't get a pass from Jesus. Spent all day doing the Lord's work, but that didn't keep them from being good neighbors. Yes, it's hard; yes, we will miss out on things we want in order to be good neighbors. But Jesus is our example, and He was self-less. He gave Himself up so we could live. Nobody's going to get to the end of life and stand before Jesus and think, "I wish I had spent more time on my hobbies rather than helping others."

Friends, you have been good neighbors. You've shown us grace in the really difficult times we've faced in 2019. For that, I'm super grateful. But the work is just starting. God has shown us what we can do as His people when confronted with trouble. I am convinced that if we show our local community the neighborliness that you've shown us over the past several weeks, CrossWay can only grow and bring more people into the knowledge and salvation of the Lord.