

Who Is My Neighbor?

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Fr. Jacob Bush

I'm sure that most people remember a television show on PBS which included such things as tours of factories (like the crayon factory), discussions about life lessons, the land of make believe and a trolley. I'm talking, of course, about the show, "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood." The theme song for the show always ended with the question, "Please won't you be my neighbor?" The legacy of that show continues on with the current show, "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood."

The question, "Won't you be my neighbor?" can leave us with the impression that the onus for being a neighbor falls on the other person. Won't *you* be *my* neighbor. But in reality, the show taught children, and others watching, about how to react to other people, and how we are to treat them in a neighborly fashion, regardless of how they treat us.

I don't mention Mr. Roger's Neighborhood just because I like to reminisce. But rather because the lawyer from the Gospel reading from Luke 10:25-37 asked Jesus an interesting question regarding neighbors. He asked, "And who is my neighbor?" That's really a good question, because the temptation is to think that only the people that live in our neighborhood are our neighbors. But, in reality, everyone we meet is our neighbor, even those people that we don't like or that don't like us are our neighbors.

So, this lawyer asks Jesus this question, probably expecting that Jesus was tell him that his neighbors were Jews. And yet Jesus didn't say that. Instead, Jesus told the man a parable to not only answer the man's question, but also to illustrate His point.

We'll begin with verse 30 of Luke 10, "Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead." Nothing so far would've thrown anyone for a loop in those days. In fact, robberies such as this happened all the time.

Also of note, is the fact that Jesus didn't tell him the nationality of the man in the parable. We could assume that the man was a Jew, but that assumption doesn't hold. He could've been any man of any nationality. And it doesn't matter what the man was as he was a man made in the image of God.

Jesus continues in verses 31-32, "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side." One commentary suggested that priests, Levites, and other Temple workers likely lived in the area around this road. So, it wouldn't be unusual for such people to travel down this road.

We read this and think that the Levite and priest would've come to the aid of the man. Jesus doesn't say anything to suggest what motivated them to walk by. And we can only speculate as to why these two people didn't help the man who obviously needed help badly. But if this man was beaten and left half dead, then it is possible that they didn't help because of

the law requiring them to be ceremonially clean to serve in the Temple. But whatever the reason, these two Jews walked right on by the man. Not exactly what this lawyer would've expected a good Jew to do, although he might have expected a Levite and a priest to stay away from the man in order to stay clean.

And it's at this point of the parable that Jesus shocks the man. Verses 33-35, "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, **34** and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'" Wait, a what? A Samaritan!

In the first century, the Jews disliked the Samaritans, and the Samaritans disliked the Jews. Primarily because of the fact that the Samaritans were people of mixed birth. They were not considered to be the people of God by the Jews because they were part Jew and part Gentile. Gentile just means not Jewish. And that mix traced back to the time of the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Assyria. The people of the Northern Kingdom were intermixed with the Assyrians in those days. And the result was a people that were part Jew, and part Gentile. Obviously not a righteous man like a Jew. See? Such was the thought process back in those days.

In fact, such is the thought process in Islam too. Arab Muslims are considered superior to all other Muslims. But this is not the case with Christianity. No one Christian is superior to another. All have equal standing before God, and we are all brothers and sisters in the family of God. Black, white, male, female, Jew, Greek, are all one in Christ. Now, there may be believers that don't get along well with us, or that we don't get along with. Differences of personality happen, but that doesn't change the fact that we are all one in Christ.

The Samaritan felt compassion for the injured man. That was his motivation for taking care of him. And his compassion led to action. He bandaged up the man's wounds. He put the man on his own beast, which meant that he had to walk. He took care of the man at an inn. He paid for the man to be taken care of, two denarii plus whatever else the innkeeper had to spend.

Keep in mind, that one denarius was about a day's wages. In very rough figures, it would be like paying over \$200 to the innkeeper to take care of the man. That was quite a sacrifice the Samaritan made on behalf of the injured man. For a lot of people today, shelling out over \$200 to take care of a stranger is asking a lot. Particularly with gas prices and food prices where they are. It was even more difficult back in those days. Yet this Samaritan was willing to do without in order to help the injured man. He was selfless. The key to being a good neighbor.

Actually, being selfless is the key to the Law also. Remember, this passage began with the lawyer trying to test Jesus by asking Him what was required to inherit eternal life. And Jesus asked him about the Law. The man replied with, "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.” That is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, which is why it is in all capital letters.

We cannot love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind if we only think about ourselves. Likewise, we cannot love our neighbor as ourselves if we are selfish. Both of those require that we stop thinking only of ourselves.

Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments” John 14:15. It goes beyond worship only, though that is part of it and is important also. In fact, we are to worship the Lord our God and serve Him only. But that too requires us to be selfless. We have to break away from whatever else we could be doing and spend time worshipping the Lord. For example, rather than playing golf on Sunday morning, we come to Church to worship the Lord.

If we love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind we will keep His commandments. If we are about seeking God and His will rather than our own will, we will keep His commandments. Keeping His commandments is the outward sign that we love God. It is the fruit. It isn't that we keep His commandments because we want to love God, a kind of a work's righteous mentality. Rather it is because we love God that we desire to keep His commandments. Faith comes first, then fruit.

And because we love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind we also love our neighbor as ourselves. Because we recognize the fact that our neighbor was made in the image of God. And Jesus said whatever you do to the least of these you do to me (Matthew 25:40). So, by loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, we are showing love for God. It is part of the fruit of our love for God. It is part of keeping God's commandments. And it flows very easily when we love God. We have that desire to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Through the parable, Jesus told the lawyer that everyone is our neighbor. Even that person we don't like is our neighbor. For this Jewish lawyer, that was the Samaritan. Who is that for you? Who is that person that you don't like? How can you be a neighbor to them?

Remember, it isn't for us to automatically expect everyone to be a neighbor to us first. Rather we first must be a neighbor to them. “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you”, Jesus said. Not ‘do unto others as they do unto you.’ Not ‘don't do unto others what you wouldn't have them do unto you.’ No. Be proactive.

The Samaritan required nothing of the injured man nor of the innkeeper. He was a neighbor. Do not expect anything of others first. First do unto others as you would have others do unto you without expecting anything in return. It isn't, “Won't you be my neighbor?” But rather it is, “can I be your neighbor?” That is the fruit that is produced when we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!