

Title: *Who is my neighbour?*

No. 201414

Venue: Tyrrell Baptist Church

Date: August 31, 2014

Scripture: Luke 10v25-37; Leviticus 19v9-18

Call to Worship: 1 John 4v7-12

Main Idea: My neighbour is anyone whose need I can meet

All Scripture is from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated

Call to Worship

(1 John 4v7-12)

[7] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. [9] In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. [10] In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Last week, we continued with the grid of the **As, Bs, Cs, Ds** — A Foundation for Christian Ministry and were on the first box of the row of Cs. I regard this as the starting place for Christian ministry.

Commandment

***“And you shall love
the Lord your God
with all your heart and
with all your soul and
with all your mind and
with all your strength.”***

(Mark 12v30)

But Jesus has provided us with more in this, His Great Commandment.

A teacher of the law asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” (Matthew 22v36)

Jesus responded by referring back to Deuteronomy and the Shema and said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. (Matthew 22v37-38)

But Jesus added a second part and that is what we will look at this morning. In preparation for that, let’s read what should be a familiar story—The Parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke’s gospel account, chapter 10 (v25-37):

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 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 neighbour as yourself.’”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii 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.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus was asked for the greatest or most important commandment and He gave the inquirer more than he bargained for.

It's like, *"Here is the Most Important Part A and here is the Most Important Part B.*

And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (v39-40):

Jesus makes the two parts inseparable in one thing we call The Great Commandment.

Last Sunday, I raised a key question that every Christian should be asking, *"What does God want from me?"*

The answer starts in what Jesus gave as Part A: *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."* (Mark 12v30)

Identifying my neighbours

Now we are told that we are to love our neighbour. Well, we live at 20 East Street in Simcoe. There are no houses across the way but we have other houses to the north and south. So, technically, I would only have to love Bryan and Judy, and Bert, and Chuck and Anne. Perhaps I'll throw in David. His house is on the corner so he might actually be a neighbour to the people on Second Avenue.

You might think, *"Bret, you're being really skimpy in your definition of neighbour!"* and I would respond, *"Yes, you are right. But it keeps life simple to define a neighbour as someone who lives in my neighbourhood."*

Perhaps I can include a few blocks of houses around our place. You see, we have a bit of a dilemma when we try to define who are our neighbours by contemporary terms of location. And, you know, Jesus doesn't allow us to narrowly define who is our neighbour.

Jesus' definition of "neighbour" has two important anchor points. One is the occasion of need. The other is the person and nature of God.

Let's review what our Lord said in this parable. There is this notorious road between Jerusalem and Jericho. His original hearers would envision a dry and dusty road flanked by high, craggy hills. Not only was it dangerous to travel because of the rocky conditions but the hills were a good hiding place for thieves who would lie in wait for isolated travellers. When the opportunity was right, these ruffians would descend upon a traveller, beat the person up and take everything of value.

As Jesus started telling the parable, his listeners would know the hidden dangers of a journey on that road.

So a traveller—probably imagined to be a Jewish traveller—fell prey to thieves. He was beaten, robbed and left for dead.

We hear about a priest and a member of the tribe of Levi—both, at different times happening upon the half-dead man and both avoiding contact with him. Both passed by on the other side of the roadway.

I'm not going to spend time looking at their behaviour. Our focus should be on this Samaritan who was travelling the same stretch of road. Now keep in mind that Samaritans and Jews had a strong dislike for one another. They were neighbouring territories with a long history of tension and disrespect. If there would be a very current example, you might consider what is going on between Russia and the Ukraine.

As Jesus continues telling the parable, He describes the Samaritan as one who stopped to help the wounded victim. The Samaritan stopped and helped and even went to great expense to make certain that there would be care for the recovery of the man.

And Jesus' question comes in verse 36: *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

The expert in the law replied, *"The one who had mercy on him."*

You notice in this recorded response that the expert in the law did not use the word *"Samaritan."* It probably would have stuck in his throat. The priest and the Levite—both part of the religious establishment—would have been far more respected by the expert in the law.

Now, a parable is a story but the event of Jesus telling the story is an actual one. Jesus brought the expert in the law to realize that the good neighbour was the one who showed mercy and care for someone in need. There was no neighbourhood in the story. It was a dry and dusty stretch of road. Nobody lived there. Nobody wanted to stay there. It was just a route from Point A to Point B to be travelled as quickly and as safely as possible.

So Jesus is defining for them—for us—that being a neighbour has more to do with the occasion than with the location.

Jesus uses the parable to show that the notion of “neighbour” is like one side of a coin. He is talking about being a good neighbour.

In the parable, His question is “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour . . . ?” and, in the answer, He points to the person who was the helper.

Then in answering the question posed by the teacher of the law about the most important commandment, Jesus says that you are to love our neighbour as you love yourself. That is the second side of the coin. It is “other” directed.

So, when He says that you should love your neighbour, who might that include? The parable of Jesus has opened up wide the possibilities.

A person in need

Quite a few years ago, I heard a message based on this parable of the Good Samaritan. The speaker concluded with this remark, “Your neighbour is anyone whom you encounter who has a need that you can meet.” That statement greatly expanded my understanding of who is my neighbour.

When you offer help at a foodbank, you are helping your neighbour. If you give money to provide food, water or medical care overseas, you are helping your neighbour. If you spend time as a literacy tutor, you are helping your neighbour. If you give to Camp Oneida so that an inner city youth can attend for a week, you are helping your neighbour. If you stop to give a ride to a seasonal farm worker, you are helping your neighbour.

Jesus is defining for us that being a neighbour has more to do with the occasion and the real need of a person rather than with the location. So that is the first anchor point.

He doesn’t make it easy for us because there are so many occasions when we can demonstrate love to others. Plus, consider that some of those people may not be so loveable.

“Your neighbour” is that generous, wide-open definition that extends into this community and beyond to people whose names we will never know.

It may seem overwhelming because there is a world of need and, in your heart, you want to reach out and help people but you don't have the means. The desire to help will burden you. Sometimes, when I see the pictures on television or hear the stories, all I can do is pray, *“Father, you know their needs, please send your servants to help.”* Sometimes, we are able to respond personally in tangible ways.

Second anchor point

As I said earlier, the first anchor point is the occasion of need. The second anchor point is the person and nature of God.

Jesus' reference to loving your neighbour arises out of Leviticus 19v18. We heard that in our Call to Worship.

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Repeatedly, through the Old Testament, when God gives instruction to His people it is punctuated by the expression, *“I am the LORD.”*

God chose the people of the tribes of Israel to be His own people (Deuteronomy 7v6f). They were not better than other people that God should have set His affection upon them. He simply chose them for His own purposes.

But by unfolding rules and statues and laws and commands, He was giving them a standard for behaviour that would distinguish them from all of the surrounding nations.

He gave them the means for transformation and one aspect of their life in community was this ethic of love that put the neighbour's interests on par with self care.

When God sets forth a rule or a way to behave, it is to a standard that reflects who He is and His very own nature. This instruction to love my neighbour as myself is a call to sacrificial love—self-giving love.

Put myself in my neighbour's place. That is what Jesus would eventually do when He went to the cross of Calvary. He put Himself in my place and in your place covering the cost of our sin and bringing healing within. The love of God towards us made the sacrifice of Christ for us the necessary way.

Conclusion

Here, in the Great Commandment, Jesus was answering the question about the most important commandment. He put the answer outside of the box of religious law and legalism.

Two parts, one commandment upon which all else applies.

Love God with the fullness of who you are—heart, soul, mind and strength.
Love and care for your neighbour as you would care for yourself.

We know who God is by His word and by the witness of Jesus.
We know our neighbour by the occasions that God places before us each day.

Jesus' compelling call is to put love into action as a way of life.

Here's a true story. Just up the road in Kitchener, a church had a Sunday service on February 14—Valentine's Day. When the bulletin was printed, someone pointed out a typographical error to the church secretary. She had typed:

"An invitation is extended to all those who love in this area to worship regularly with us."

(SOURCE: Kathy Mackenzie, Kitchener, Ont. Christian Reader, "Lite Fare.")

It might have been a typing error but people should not mistake that love towards God and love towards others is to be the quality of our Christian lives!

Leviticus 19

- ⁹ *'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest.*
- ¹⁰ *'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.*
- ¹¹ *'You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.*
- ¹² *'You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.*
- ¹³ *'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.*
- ¹⁴ *'You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.*
- ¹⁵ *'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.*
- ¹⁶ *'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD.*
- ¹⁷ *'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him.*
- ¹⁸ *'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.*