

Love Your Neighbor As Yourself

Here's a question, WHO IS YOUR NEIGHBOR?

Reminding us of what Jesus has taught and said,

The Apostle Paul says all of the commandments are summed up in those words, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Let's be honest. That's not always an easy thing to do. Now of course, neighbors are not meant to be only the people living next door to us, but who is our neighbor?

Of course Jesus had said the same thing. One of the Pharisees asked Jesus a question to test him. He asked, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

"This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

But who is our neighbor? As we know from the Good Samaritan story, it isn't the neighbor we might choose. It's not necessarily the one who looks like us.

The neighbor is the one who shows up whether we like it or not.

It's maybe not the one we would hang out with. It might even be one we might try to avoid.

This neighbor is always an unexpected person in our lives.

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This week while going through her mother's things, my wife stumbled across an article her mother had clipped out of the paper several years ago.

It was written by a Pastor Herold Stoa who was a pastor several years ago at Faith Lutheran Church in Lakeside here in Duluth.

It had to do with what a man, whom we could call a neighbor, showing up at his office on Christmas.

I want to share that story with you today.

Here is how he told it:

"He stood there at my office door, shivering in the cold December twilight air. He was young, muscular, well-tanned, bit disheveled in appearance. He wore a scraggly beard, had shoulder-length hair and a lined face that said he was acquainted with sorrow.

He evidently was a transient and most likely had come for a handout.

Come on in, I said motioning him to a chair, eager to get it over with and resigned that I would be parting soon with a few dollars so that we might help keep the image of the church in shape, trying to show that we care for people in a time of need.

It seems he had come to town to spend Christmas with friends---people who had often invited him to stop by their homes. Now he had come and to his surprise found no warm welcome, little Christmas joy and no invitation to spend the night.

It was Christmas Eve and no one should have to spend the night alone.

He told about arriving at one home where, expecting a welcome, he found the people not willing even to recognize him. It seems they had

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relatives spending Christmas with them and were almost ashamed to admit they knew anyone like him.

He made his way to a second home only to find that they were off to a Christmas party. They said perhaps you could come back after the holidays.

He went to the bus stop to ride across town to friends in the Lakeside area. But there too he was met with a cold reception.

Wandering aimlessly, he had seen the light in the pastor's office. The pastor wrote he truly felt for him and wished he had more time, but he had a sermon to prepare and the family dinner in an hour or so.

He said he gave the man bus fare and gave him a couple of dollars as he ushered him out the door.

But then the pastor said he didn't get his name which he kept track of to report to his council. He gave the man a pen and asked him to write down his name.

The man took the pen and scribbled something on the sheet of paper and hurried out the door.

The pastor said, "I returned to my sermon, looking curiously at the name which he had written on the paper and on it he had written simply 'JUST A STANGER, A STRANGER FROM GALILEE.'"

Back to the question Who Is Your Neighbor?

Paul goes on to say, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a call to remember our baptism. We are clothed in Jesus Christ. As we wear that clothing we are robed in in our baptisms, we are filled with the

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radical love of God to live for our neighbor whoever and wherever that neighbor may be.

In the book of Colossians chapter 3, we read,

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness humility, meekness, and patience.Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Peter Marty who is the editor of Christian Century magazine has written the following. He says, “taped to my office bookshelf is a postcard with a William Blake poem:

“I sought my soul, but my soul I could not see; I sought my God, but my God eluded me; I sought my neighbor, and I found all three.”

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul says. When you do that you will see that your neighbor is everyone all around you.

Amen