

Scripture: Exodus 20:16-17; Luke 10:25-37

Sermon Title: "Neighborly"

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Today we are concluding our summer journey through the Ten Commandments as we consider the last two commands: "you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" and "you shall not covet that which is your neighbors". And as we do this, we too consider the teachings of Jesus, as we will again be holding the question of what does this law mean for the modern day Christ follower?

Now these last two commandments explicitly refer to the actions which impact our neighbors. And the general understanding of neighbor throughout Scripture tends to be one that embrace everybody. Our neighbors are not just those who live down the street, or in the same community, but essentially our entire human family is a neighbor to us. And these two commands encourage us to not do bad things, not do harm against our neighbors. Just like the commands before them about murder, adultery, stealing – they all have an air about them of not doing harm to others. That, in and of itself is a good message. Still, how we relate to our neighbors is not simply about the ways in which we don't negatively impact them. It's also about how we bless them too.

A couple of my role models in the art of being a neighbor were David and Ella, the physical neighbors of my maternal grandparents. I remember particularly when my grandfather was ill and nearing the end of his life, these neighbors would stop by from time-to-time to simply check in and visit with them. They would offer help if the need ever arose. They would come by with some of the most delicious baked goods – homemade bread, pies – which too gave them a chance to check in and chat. After my grandfather passed away, David and Ella stepped up their neighboring blessings ever more. If they noticed that the lawn had not been mowed, they would just come and cut the grass. My grandmother didn't even need to ask. If they didn't see her out and about for a day, they would swing by to just make sure she was okay. My grandparent's home also had a basement that was susceptible to flooding when we got a lot of rain and so

David would come by and set up the sump pump in the basement whenever a threat of heavy rain would come. They would clear snow in the winter and the baked goods continued to flow! And all of this gave my parents, my brother, and me a piece of mind as we knew that someone so close by was watching out for her when we couldn't be right there all the time. That was an invaluable gift from a wonderful neighbor. When my grandmother passed away 3 years later, David and Ella were among the first to offer their sympathy and offer a helping hand as we made arrangements. And while I was living that following summer in my grandparents' house, cleaning it out and getting it ready to be sold, they would stop by, say hello, offer any help, and yes, the occasional baked good too would still grace my presence! They are two of my role models for what it means to be a neighbor. They did not only do no harm, they blessed our family in such beautiful ways - ways for which I will forever be thankful.

When Jesus is asked by this lawyer in the Gospel of Luke "who is my neighbor?" and he responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan, he is teaching us the importance of not just doing no harm to our neighbor but bless them, particularly in times of need. Let's think about this a little further - the priest and the levite, representing in this case the religious folks, who came upon the man along the road and walked on by, they did not break any of the Ten Commandments. By a strict, letter-of-the-law interpretation, looking solely at the commands, they did not inflict harm on the man lying by the road left for dead. Still, according to our Christ, this is not good enough. Again, I will say it, it's not just about doing no harm, it's about blessing those around us. And so, in steps the Good Samaritan, who, within his means, offers care - bandages his wounds, takes him to an inn, even paying for him to stay there and be cared for as he heals and regains his strength. We, as followers of Jesus are not called simply to just inflict no harm, but we are called to bless. Yes, we should not negatively impact the lives of others, but we are called also to be a positive influence in their lives. We are called to care. We are called to love those around us into health and into wholeness. This is what it means to be neighborly.

And while this parable speaks to a time of extreme crisis as in the life of the man by the roadside, after being beaten, robbed, and left for dead, the need of another is not always as visible. In fact, on the surface, we may not even know that a need exists within the lives of those around us. We are often so good at hiding the pain and the struggles within. And yet, whether someone live right next to us or we are passing strangers on the street, they may be in need – in need of a kind word, in need of a smile, in need of someone to acknowledge their existence, in need of someone to simply care. They may hide it well but need a Good Samaritan to step into their lives and breathe hope, peace, strength into their existence again. The need may not always be seen as in a man beaten by the roadside, or in the case of my grandmother, an elderly woman living alone after her partner's passing, but that doesn't mean there isn't a longing within the soul for something more. So, wouldn't it be best if we always strived to live a life which blessed the people around us? And here may be the biggest challenge, one which we have talked about before – the challenge of not just being a neighbor to those who are like us, with whom we agree, not even just those who are nice to us in return – but bless all the people around us, regardless of the differences, regardless of the past, regardless of how they will respond to our outstretched hand of love. For in the end, remember that Jesus puts the onus on us to be a neighbor. We can't control the response, but it is our call to care. It is our task to be a neighbor. When Jesus responds to the question of "who is my neighbor?" he sort of flips the answer. It's not about who is our neighbor by definition, it about how we will be a neighbor to those around us. It's about how we will be neighborly in all of our living and all of our loving. Neighbor is not simply a description but, according to Jesus, it is an action.

Beloved People of God, being a neighbor to our whole human family is a tall order that is not always easy and yet it is one we strive for, and today we continue to seek just that. So might we go forth from this place today, loving those around us. May we check in on our physical neighbors, say hello, write a note that reminds them that we are thinking about them and we care for them. May we call someone we have not seen in a

while. May we visit someone who is sick or someone who can't get out like they used to. May we share a smile! And perhaps in honor of David and Ella, may we make some baked goods to share and have an excuse to check in with those around us too. May we be neighborly and bless this day and every day, as often as we can, all who will come to cross our path. So be it and may it be so. Amen.