

All Those Neighbors

Amos 7:7-17; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37; Psalm 82, 7-15-07

Living in a small community, as we do, we cannot escape our neighbors. We might try from time to time but they always are with us. There is an intensity in smaller towns that does not exist in larger urban and suburban areas. This is not a bad thing but can often be a perplexing challenge.

In reflecting on the story of the Good Samaritan, in the gospel of Luke, the only gospel in which it is found, I could not help but think of our area and our reactions to people in trouble. What would we do if we saw someone beaten and bloody and half alive lying next to the road?

If it was an animal I know the response would be very quick. The Animal Control Officer would be called in an instant. But, what if it was a person and one obviously not from the town. Someone broken and bloody, dumped next to 183 in the dark of night and left to die. Would we rush right over, bind up his or her wounds, pack them into our car and take them to the nearest medical facility? Or, might we keep our distance and call 911? There is nothing wrong with calling 911—it is a very good thing to do. It is a far better thing than crossing to the other side of the road and walking on by because we fear we will get our hands dirty or get too involved. The Levite and the priest were afraid they would be made impure from contact with a half-dead person. That was Jewish law. Do we follow that same law?

Or, after calling 911, would we approach the person and offer comfort and solace while we await the ambulance and then go along to the hospital and offer to cover any and all medical costs the person might run up while being restored to health? Besides being someone foreign to us, this person is, of course, uninsured.

What would we do with this alien being? Would we recall the commandment Jesus called the most important: “To love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind and our neighbor as our self?” This is a struggle we all must resolve in our own souls. Who is our neighbor? In this parable it is the person who bestows mercy to another.

So, because we do not have someone literally lying beside the road too often, if ever, we must consider how we treat the neighbors with whom we are in contact each and every day.

How do we treat the young mothers and fathers among us so overwhelmed by the duties of home and hearth; the struggle of raising children with never quite enough money but often an abundance of love? Do we look for ways to support them or do we delight in pointing out the places we feel they fall short in raising their children? Being the parents of young children is a tough job—demanding and very tiring. Anyone who chooses to have children and who struggles to raise them deserves all the support we can give them. They are our neighbors and worthy of our support, love and concern.

How do we treat the elderly among us? There are more of us in this group every day. Do we recognize their need for tender support while respecting the independence they so long for and deserve? Can we refrain from treating them all as if they are a bit senile? Do we have the patience to listen to them and understand their concerns? Do we have the

strength to help them fight for decent medical care? They are our neighbors and worthy of our support, love and concern.

What about those in that middle-aged group—sometimes known as the “sandwich generation?” Caught between children and aging parents? Do we offer them understanding ears? If we have “been there, done that” can we help them find solutions to some of their challenges? Can we remember to offer solutions only when asked for and not hand out advice willy-nilly when it is not asked for? Are we there to offer a helping hand as they walk on their own tightrope through life. They are our neighbors and worthy of our support, love and concern.

And what of those who struggle with addictions in life? Are we able to give them our time, to listen patiently and to help them find a way out of their trouble? Are we willing to remember that often we will have to walk a long and twisted road with them before we see the light of day clearly and surely? Do we remember that often for every two steps forward there is at least one backward? Do we understand that a person can only change themselves, we cannot do it for them? Is it easier to cross to the other side of the road and leave them in their destructive misery? They are our neighbors and worthy of our support, love and concern.

And what of “All the lonely people, where do they all come from. All the lonely people, where do they all belong.” (“Eleanor Rigby) What of all of them? They are all around us and among us. Do we have time for the lonely people who have no one else? Do we have time to share the love of God with them—a love that needs to radiate in and through us? Can we help them find a place where they do belong? They are our neighbors and are worthy of our support, love and concern.

Of course, as Christians, we understand this. And yes, almost always, we are there ready to help. But even the very best of us have our limits and need to be supported and loved and maintained. Those who are wise find small escape valves for their lives. They go for a walk along the Sandy Brook, they make time for meditation or for some reading of a spiritual nature, they go for a bike ride, they take an hour—well not quite an hour —on a Sunday and seek to simply sit in the presence of God in church and gaze upon the neighbors gathered around them. In this special time, the presence of God becomes more real and the spark of God that resides within becomes re-ignited and they are renewed and can return to the hurly burly of our world and seek to make things new again for all those neighbors who surround them.

Jesus came to us to show us the way to new life. But, not only to do that, to also show us the way to help others find life and find it in abundance--an abundance of love and understanding. Jesus still comes to us prodding us forward inch by inch into a better understanding and love for our neighbors, those lying beside the road of life, asking only that we stop for a bit and help them toward wholeness.

There is a hymn entitled “The Servant Song” that sums this up. (Richard Gillard, 1953) (v. 2, 3, 4)

We are pilgrims on a journey,

We are trav'lers on the road;

We are here to help each other

Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping:
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow
'Til we've see this journey through.

Amen