

Luke 10.25-37
St Stephens

Oct 3/4, 2009
Weekend Message

Loving Your Neighbor

Welcome to **Missions weekend** at St Stephens. This year, we are not just having a missions weekend, but a **missions month**. And we are going to be focusing on a **special mission field** – the one next door to where you live and where you work. We want to talk all month about getting **God's love into our neighborhoods**.

Neighborhoods in modern America don't feel much like neighborhoods anymore. Have you noticed that? We **hardly know** who lives on our street, who brings us the mail every day, or who runs the shops in our boroughs.

The best way I can describe it is that **we live in little tunnels** in modern America. We get up in the morning and **dash** to our cars. If someone is walking their dog or taking the kids to the school bus, a quick wave is all we have time for. We have to **move fast** or we will be late. We don't know the neighborhoods along the way, even though we drive past them every day. We barely know the names of the people who serve us, see us, or even those who work next to us – and if you do know their names, **do you know much of anything about their lives?** Could you tell me about their hopes and dreams, their fears and their hardships? Often not, and that is the way life is these days.

This is **nothing new**. Jesus had an incident with one of the local religious authorities where they talked about exactly just this thing. One of the scribes was trying to trap him and asked him what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Good question. Lousy motive.

Jesus asks him for his own answer. It's a very good one:

"he answered, "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.”

Luke 10:27

These are what we call **the great commandments**, the love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus says

"You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

Luke 10:28

Then **it gets interesting**, because it is **not so easy to do!** This loving your neighbor thing is tough, and when the law is difficult, the way people deal with it is to **pull it down**. Make it easy.

And so the scribe asks Jesus

"But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"" (Luke 10:29)

In fact, the rabbis had a long running debate about exactly who their neighbors were! Most of their answers were tight little circles of people who happened to be just like them.

So Jesus tells him **a story**.

"A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

Luke 10.30

The road from Jerusalem down to Jericho is about 30 miles long, and it descends some 3000 feet. **When I was in Israel** last year I wanted to walk part of it. It goes through wild desert hill country. My tour guide told me I'd have to pay \$500 for a bodyguard if I wanted to give it a try. I passed it up. It was **dangerous** in Jesus' day, and it is still dangerous in ours.

This guy was walking that same road and he got mugged, beaten,

stripped and left for dead. **Three guys** come along, one after another, and see this guy lying in the ditch.

The first two guys are a pastor and a seminary prof, and heres how they deal with it. They...

“Walk On By”

By chance a [pastor] came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A [seminary professor] walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

Luke 10.31,32

They saw him, and then they cross to the other side of the road and ‘walk on by’. It is easy to walk on by. Maybe they were **on their way up to the temple** to help lead worship services. Jericho had some 12000 clergy living there who regularly went up to Jerusalem to help lead temple worship. Probably these two had important business in Jerusalem. They **didn’t have time**. And by the way, they might have thought, if this guy was stupid to walk this road alone, and maybe he is dead and if we touch him, we will be ceremonially **unclean** and unable to even enter the Temple. So they were busy, and they had their excuses. **They were ‘walk on by’ guys**. Ever done that? The sharpest regrets of my life are times when I walked on by. It is easy to do.

Jesus goes on with his story and we meet another guy...

“Stop and Help”

Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.

Luke 10.33,34

Along comes this third guy, and he's one of those '**half-breed heritics**' – that's what the Jews thought of the Samaritans, and it is pretty much what the Samaritans thought of the Jews. **This guy** sees the man, but instead of walking away from him, he **goes over to him** and helps him out. He tends to him, puts him on his own donkey and takes him to an inn and stays with him through the night. The next day he leaves, promising to pay whatever extra is needed when he returns. **He was a 'stop and help' guy** – and it is impressive.

It defines Jesus' answer to the question of **who your neighbor is**. He is saying that **racial issues** don't define your neighborhood. Neither do **religious issues** or **economic issues**, nor any other kind of issues. Your neighbor is that wild teenager, the new baby, the mom with a crisis pregnancy and her unwanted child, the neighbor with a brave smile and a crumbling marriage, the old or infirmed, and more like them. Just **start with the people next to you, within your reach: wherever you are, whoever they are**.

Which kind of guy would you like to be? It is not a question that can be answered quickly. If you are like me, you are a '**walk on by' guy** who **wants to be a 'stop and help guy'**. This journey is a God journey. I'd like to make **two suggestions** on how this can be walked.

Take Time to See the People Around You

Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him... he took care of him.

| Luke 10.33,34

Note the little phrases, '*he saw the man*', and '*felt compassion*' and '*going over to him*'. They go together. **Compassion starts with the eyes**, I think. It starts when you look, and it **grows** when you **stop**

and go over and look again, and if **blossoms** when you **do something** to help.

The **eyes and the ears are God's pathways to the heart**. If you are going to be compassionate, you have to slow down and see people, really see them – who they are, how they love, what they suffer, what they need. When you do, your love for people grows.

We don't do this well because we are so often on such **a hurry**, and seeing people like this takes time. But **love is a four letter word** that is spelled like this: '**T-I-M-E**'. **Hurry is the death of compassion**. They just don't go together.

So sometimes you have to **let your agenda go**. Sometimes you have to just give it up. Sometimes you have to just trust that an **occasional interruption** to your plans for your day is **no interruption** at all to God's plans for your day. And you can trust him to work it out – and slow down and help.

Sometimes the best kindness is **just taking the time to listen** and not trying to give all the answers. **Joe Bailey** wrote a book on grief. He called it **A View From the Hearse**. He says this from his experience: *"I was sitting, torn by grief, and somebody came along and talked to me about God's dealings of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly. He said things I knew were true. But I was unmoved, except to wish that he would go away. And he finally did. Then another one came and sat beside me, and he didn't talk at all. He didn't ask me any leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour or more, listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply and left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go."*

Often your time and your presence and your caring are the very best kind of love you can give to your neighbors. **You can be the kind of**

neighbor people hate to see go.

Here's a second part of compassion, and it is essential:

Take Time to Help the People Around You

Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.

Luke 10.33,34

Over and over again in the bible we are told that **love is not a feeling, not an emotion, but an action. Love is action pursuing the well being of people around you.** It will effect your emotions, but is independent of them. That means you can love people when you don't feel love for them. Because love means acting for their well being, for their good. That is what the Samaritan did. He stopped, went over to the man and took care of him. He put him on his donkey and took him to an inn, where he could recover. He nursed him through the night and promised to pay the bill.

Note as well that **he didn't delay** to do this. So often we will say, well, if no one else has helped the guy, on my way back down from Jerusalem in a day or two, I'll stop and help. But compassion doesn't work that way. **It stops and steps in and helps.** It **wasn't convenient** for him to stop, but he did. It might even have been risky for him to stop – maybe the guy was just faking it and his friends were using him for bait to jump someone for real! But he risked it. That is what love does. It stops and steps in and helps. **Even when it interrupts** your day. Even when there is a **risk.**

I love this paraphrase of Proverbs 3.27:

Never walk away from someone who deserves help; your hand is God's hand for that person. Don't tell your neighbor "Maybe some other time" or "Try me tomorrow" when the money's right there in your pocket.

Prov 3.27-28 (Msg)

And that brings me to my **last comment about growing in**

compassion. Jesus simply concludes his story with a word to us all:

'Go and do the same...'

Luke 10.27

If you decide you want to be a 'stop and help' kind of person, you are going to run into a problem. Actually you will run into **lots of problems**. Time and schedules and interruptions and risks and criticisms and more. But the biggest problem you will run into is the one inside you – **your own heart**. You will find again and again that you have this **heart obstacle to heart compassion**. In it's raw form, there is simply a large part of you that **isn't interested** in becoming more loving. When you catch a glimpse of that disinterest – that hardness, that coldness, **here is what you do**.

You **remember who it is** who told you to 'go and do the same' – and you remember **where he was going** as he said this. Up to Jerusalem, as Aaron reminded us last week. Up to Jerusalem himself, **carrying us** not on a donkey, but on his own back, to **give whatever** it would take – and it would take everything – to cleanse our hearts, and give us new hearts, hearts like his with love like his – and **you pray to him, with his cross in sight**, *"Lord – all this hardness and all this coldness in my heart; would you wash me again and forgive me again? Would you give me eyes like yours for the people around me, compassion like yours for the folks next door, love like yours – that stops and steps in and does whatever it takes"*. You will find that he answers that prayer. Day by day and year by year, he does.