

Parables and Teachings of Jesus

The Good Neighbor

Luke 10: 25-37

So, we're going to study God's Word a moment and I'm going to read it to you. I was just thinking again about the song -- I Need You. And in a sense, today's passage is about a man who thinks he does not need Jesus or does not need God. And so, it stands as a very strong reminder to us. I'm going to read to you from God's Word, Luke 10. We're in a short series on the teachings of Jesus. Some of the greatest joys of life begins with a man coming to Jesus with a question. This is God's word...

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ And 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." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii^[a] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Pray one more time for a moment, Lord, give us, we pray, ears to hear what you're saying to us, but who you are and who we are in your presence. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

It's a Q&A session. A lawyer, a teacher of the law of God asks Jesus a question. Jesus answers it with a story. And then? Then there's another question. The question is, who became a neighbor? And finally we look at Jesus, who is I will offer to you the Good Samaritan. So for any number of years I was a runner and I would run wherever I lived, put on my shoes, go out the door and start running till I was done running. And you meet people. When you run, you run.

And there are other runners and walkers and in some places like Birmingham or Saint Louis, where I've lived half my life, when you see somebody running or walking, you acknowledge them, you nod your head, you say a quick hello, at least something. You wave at them something. But I've lived in other places. I've lived in Connecticut a couple times, and in Connecticut it's different when you go running and you see somebody in the street, you're not at them and they turn their head. They don't want to talk to you. In fact, if you said too much, they're liable to become frightened, maybe even contact the police. There's a man talking to me at random on the street.

Now, as I meditated on this, I noticed it in the news. There were several accounts, and I'm not against the northwest. I'm just against sort of the northeast. I'm against the northeast on this point, there were a number of people who were robbed or attacked or beaten or something like that, and nobody came to the rescue. And I thought, I think I see a connection because if you're running and you nod your head at somebody, you're saying, I'm your neighbor. I'm a person, you're a person. We're together in this space. I acknowledge that, and if you don't, you're kind of saying, the people I meet are not my neighbors. I don't I don't have any connection to them. And I thought, if you practice sort of turning your head when you see somebody, it's probably easier to turn your head when you hear a cry for help. Now, that might be true, and it might not be true, but certainly here at Briarwood, if you are aware of it. Like every good church, we have purpose statements and vision statements and values that we state. And those values say, among other things, that we're an equipping church that radiates the gospel of grace by making disciples and evangelism and discipleship and church revitalization and church planting, and by deeds of love and justice and mercy, which means we should love this parable because it teaches us about love and justice and mercy. And of course, every passage leads us to the gospel.

Now, the story began with a lawyer. A lawyer is not a lawyer like we have today that shows up in law courts or helps settle disputes, adjudicate controversies about things like inheritances. It's not that kind of a lawyer. It's someone who studies the law of God and teaches the law of God, which is the basis for the fabric of society in those days. Now, this man was a teacher and he comes to Jesus as a fellow teacher. In fact, he calls Jesus teacher. So we think, okay, he's well disposed toward Jesus. You know, I was trained and although Jesus wasn't formally trained, he says, you know, you're a teacher too. And so we're going to have a conversation teacher to teacher. So far, so good. But then we read that he came testing Jesus. And the idea seems to be, is we find many times in the Gospels that this man wants to see if he knows more than Jesus, prove him wrong, put him to the test, tempt him, see if he passes in the trial. He's about to lay upon Jesus about the great questions of their day, which included.

One of the things they debated, or discussed was, what's the greatest commandment in the law of God? And they had views, and he asked Jesus his view. Specifically. He asks, what shall I do? Or what must I do to inherit eternal life? As I said before, what he really says is having done what? That's a very literal translation of the original, having done it, and it's done then, then

having done it, what can I do so that God will owe me eternal life? What can I do to inherit eternal life? Now, if you think about it just a little bit, you know this is a bad question. Now, I know we're starting back at school and teachers are never supposed to say that's a bad question. But some questions come very close. And this is one of those questions. What shall I do to inherit is all wrong. You don't do to inherit. You inherit because you are a child of your mother or your father, or maybe your grandparents gave you an inheritance. You don't do anything. You inherit. This comes from a relationship. But the lawyer, of course, does not understand that what they debated was what shall I do? Because they had the idea. Many, many people in that day and to this day have the idea that I can be right with God if I do more good than bad. Maybe a lot more good than bad, or if I do something wrong, if I make up for it and say I'm sorry and prove I'm sorry by certain deeds, then God will say, okay, they're really sorry and they're trying to make up for it. So I'll give them the A, grant them eternal life. But of course, the law of God has many parts.

And although the lawyer gave a good answer, saying the core of it is loving God and neighbor. That's correct. There are hundreds of other laws. And so the people at that time wondered, is there any way, if I have to be good enough to return, to receive eternal salvation or on salvation, or prove that you're worthy of salvation? Is there any way we can shorten the list or make it a little more accessible? And the answers to that and one of the answers is touched on just here. What must I do now? Jesus could have said, friend, you've got it all wrong. It's not what you do. And he could have preached the gospel that we know and celebrate in this church. And that is, there's nothing you can do to earn God's favor. You're sinner. Repent, face your need, your sinfulness, your need of Christ, and believe in Jesus as he's offered to us in the gospel. Son of God, Son of man came, lived a perfect life, died and rose by faith, united to him. He could have said that, but he didn't because the man wasn't ready for that at the moment. So Jesus engages him in a little bit of a dialog. He doesn't say, you've got it all wrong. He says, hey, we're both teachers. What's your take on this question? What's written in the law? How do you how do you read it? Which means how do you interpret it? How do you understand it? How do you systematize what's found in the Bible? What's your answer? And he says it's a good answer. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. He said. That's my answer. A lot of people said that was the right answer. Jesus says, good answer, good answer. You get on 100% on the quiz. The quiz had one question and you nailed it. Way to go. It is a good answer, but there's a nuance to it. I don't talk about the original languages all that much usually, but today it really counts because the man said having done what that is to say, what can I do? And having done it, I can kind of kick back and relax because I've done what I need to do. And when Jesus says, good answer, do this and live, he uses a form of the verb, a form of the command. That's it's in the present tense in Greek, and the present tense means do it and keep on doing it. So there's tension, he says, having done what? And Jesus says, no, no, no, you got to keep doing it.

If you want to earn eternal life, you have to perfectly love God, heart, soul, mind and strength. No, no dark thoughts. And you have to love your neighbor as yourself. In fact, that's even there

in the command as it's written in the Old Testament. And it just says, you shall love the Lord your God. Now, I don't know if you pay attention this kind of thing, but, the form of an imperative varies. And let's suppose I'm a teacher, which I am, professor, on loan to you for a while, and I've got a class that starts at 8:00. And so, you know, especially college or grad school students, you know, they're on their own and they, they just might stroll in at 8:07 or 8:10 or 8:03 and I might see them after a week of this. I might say, please come to class on time. That's a very gentle imperative. It means I want you to come to class sometime. You should come to class on time. And I may say, after another week of delinquent behavior, you know, you really need to come on class to class sometime because you're missing all the announcements, description, the assignments that you need to come to class on time. That's actually an indicative statement. You need to come to class, but it functions as an imperative. And I could say you must come to class on time. But if I really mean it, I may say you shall come to class on time. You will come to class on time. I'm going to make it so that's the strongest form in some languages of a command.

And Jesus says, you shall love the Lord your God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. If what you want to do is inherit eternal life, you're going to do something. Stakes are high. So is Jesus proposing salvation by works? No, he is not. Because loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength is not a work to love God is. It is an active relationship. To love God is to be connected to him. Jesus is answering an antagonist. He's not giving, shall we say, straightforward teaching.

Now, the lawyer may have been a little bit upset at the moment because he asked Jesus a question, and Jesus says to him, what's your answer? Jesus turns his table, turns the tables on him. He came to question Jesus. Jesus questioned him, and Jesus patted him on the head and said, good answer. And so it says in the text that he wanted to justify himself. Now he might have wanted to justify himself, that is to say, make himself look good in two ways. And they're both probably true. The first one is, hey, I've got a follow up question. You know, I asked you a question. I knew the answer. We could feel a little bit odd asking a question, knowing the answer. I've got a follow up question.

Who's my neighbor? Probably part of it, but the bigger part is probably connected to the debate they had in that society at that time. And that debate was, who's my neighbor? They discussed it. And in fact, because Israel at that time had Romans and Egyptians and Syrians and Greeks living in large numbers inside the borders of Israel, so that most scholars think about half the people living in the borders of Israel at that time were not Jewish. That means that about half the people in Jerusalem, half the people I bumped into on a regular basis, are not fellow Jews. And many teachers said a Jew does not owe anything to a Gentile. In fact, in fact, one of them said this a major teacher. He said, if you see a Gentile fall into the sea and they can't swim, and you can, you do not need to rescue him, for he is not your neighbor. Now if you want to jump in and save him, go ahead. But you're under no obligation whatsoever. In fact, they also said, if you're going to do good for somebody, no, for whom you do it, do good for a godly man, a

righteous man, you do not need to do good to a godless person. That's what the rabbis taught. The teachers of the day taught. Jesus says, love your neighbor as yourself. I want to just take a sidebar for a second. I don't address politics in church, and that's a tradition here. But I we do address issues. And one of the issues is before our society today is this is this very issue a different form?

And that is, even as the Jews had a tendency, the Jewish rabbis had a tendency in that day to define people in or out as neighbor. So my fellow Jew is my neighbor, and my Gentile, whom I see floundering in the water, is not my neighbor in or out. And, you know, if you define half of humanity out, not my neighbor, it's a whole lot easier to love your neighbor as yourself. Because you don't know anything to half the people you see. And that happens in our society, above all with the unborn. You know, when we want the little one we call the baby, and when we don't want it, we call it a problem or a fetus or the problem of conception. We're not supposed to define people in and out. We meet people and become neighbors to them. I'll go far away in the Mediterranean. A few years ago, there were lots of boats from people from Libya crossing over into Italy, and then the boats were too laden with people, and people would fall into the ocean. And sometimes the other navies would let them drown. Not my neighbor. That's what they said. I don't need to give them any help. I have no obligation to them. It's not the way God sees it. I'm not trying to solve the immigration problem. I'm just saying it's human nature to define in and out. Now we have at the moment hurricane season and the first hurricane that came this year got an A name and it never amounted to anything. And the next three became real hurricanes. Hurricane Beryl. Well actually she didn't get it either. And Hurricane Debbie -- kind of them to name that after my wife. And then Hurricane Ernesto. Now, if you read about the hurricanes, the hurricanes go roaring across the islands in the Caribbean. And do we do we all of them help or not?

And of course, there are wildfires in Colorado again this year, and also even more in Montana and even more Northern California. What are we out of the people? What do you owe to the people in Ukraine who are being attacked and attacked by the Russians? What do you know, the people in South Sudan, where there's been a civil war raging for months and innocent people are caught and now starving? What do we owe to them? What do we owe? It's a question. It's a human question. We feel got too much information. I can't help everybody that comes my way. And so I need more information. Jesus, teach us something about this. And he does. It's called the parable. The Good Samaritan. It goes like this.

There's a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now, that journey is one I've taken, I don't know, ten times or so, and it's about 17 miles. In fact, it's exactly 17 miles, or maybe it's 37. One of those numbers ends in seven. It's a journey. And I think it's 37, actually. And you go down and Jerusalem is around 2000 and 2500ft up White Mountain. Lovely temperature, cool and as you go down, it keeps getting hotter and hotter and drier and drier until you get down to Jericho, which is an oasis in one of the hottest and dry places in the world. Temperatures are going to easily be 102 or 105. It's hot. Trees don't grow much. People don't live there much. As you go

down that road, you might see a desert goat or a few stunted, miserable trees that couldn't give shade to a small rabbit. And people don't travel much in those days. And a man's traveling, and he's set upon by thieves, and he is beaten severely, knocked unconscious. And they take his clothes, his outer clothes. So he's lying there unconscious, silent and without clothes. And this is important because, again, in that society at that time, about half the people were Jews and half were non-Jews. And you could tell what ethnicity someone belonged to by the way they speak. You all can tell I'm not from Alabama. I bet it's probably not even hard. You're not quite sure where I come from, but not from around here. And we can tell somebody is to some degree by the close, but much more. In those days, people spoke different languages and more distinctive ethnic closer. So you could tell if someone was a Jewish gentile by looking at their clothes or listening to him to talk, and he can't talk, and he's not wearing anything but his inner tunic. So he's just a man in need. Now we're going to imagine that he is lying right about here. By chance, meaning there weren't many travelers. So by chance, a priest is coming down. The priest in those days were upper class. They had enough money to ride on a horse or a donkey. Ordinary people walked, but they were wealthier. They had resources. And so, a priest is going down that road and saw him and pass by on the other side. Now people love the condemned, the priest for being cruel, but it's not quite that simple. The law said, A priest must not touch a dead man.

In fact, the interpretation of the law was don't even get close enough to touch and don't. In fact, let the shadow of a dead person touch you. You'll be defiled. And what does that mean? For a priest to be defiled means you can't fulfill your priestly duties in the temple precincts, which means you're temporarily unemployed, receiving no income for a couple of weeks, and to purify yourself, you must buy a red heifer and burn it to ash. You don't get to eat it. Do anything with it. You got to destroy it, and then you're clean. In other words, there's a command that says, don't touch, and he's unkind conscious. It looks like he's probably dead. I can't get close enough to be sure without running the risk of defiling myself. Losing today's terms. Thousands and thousands of dollars. So the system actually made it very easy for him to go on the other side, which is the way it works today. The system makes it easy for us to be callous because the system tells us so much about the needs that are out there, and we turn it off and we say, I don't want to see anymore pictures of starving children. Can't stand anymore. Just turn away.

Well, then a Levite comes. Now, Levites were a lot like priests. They're still serving the temple, but they were not of the same rank. They had less money, less resources, or less prestige. And this. But they tried to kind of. They were priest wannabes. They tried to live like a priest as much as they could, so they also wouldn't touch a dead body. The Levite, however, came to the place the priest saw and said, I'm out of here. And the priest sets the example to some extent for Levi, but the Levi at least comes and looks. But it says he came to the place and saw him, and then passed by, implies that he thought about it, and then said no, but a Samaritan, as you journeyed, came to where he was like the Levite. He came to the man. But it says, when he saw him, he felt compassion. That is, he didn't decide to turn off the feeling of kindness. He decided to turn on or let the feeling come over him and feel compassion for the man who's been left for dead, beaten. Now, I told you that half the people in Israel were Jews and half were Gentiles.

About a million people, best guess at the time, lived in Israel. About 5000 of them were Samaritans, 4000 to 5000, meaning that point four or point 5% of the population was Samaritan, meaning that the chances that he's going to see a fellow Samaritan are extremely low, meaning that if he's playing the game of defining people in and out his neighbor, this guy is almost certainly not a neighbor, but he feels compassion and he helps the man. He feels the compassion. He came to the man and helped them. Now, what that means is, if you're trying to ask the question, who's my neighbor? The answer is, see who God puts in your life.

So some years ago, I was teaching at a seminary in northern India for a week or so. If you're from those parts, Uttar Pradesh, the city was Dehradun in about 45 miles or so to the east of Dehradun, there was an orphanage and we teach all morning, have classes sort of 8:30 at 12 and then teach at night. And in the afternoons, we'd go places and we went to this orphanage. The orphanage started when two missionaries to the Hindus had a baby and a slightly older child deposited on their doorstep in the middle of the night. And they came out the next morning and they saw these little ones and they said, looks like we have new neighbors and brought them in, took care of them. They found out later that to people, two parents, husband and wife were both dying and heard about missionaries, that they'd have compassion. So they deposited the children hoping for the best and word spread. And then five, ten, 15, 20, 30, 40, 80, 100, 150 children were deposited at the door of these missionaries, and they kept bringing them in and eventually said, we better get organized. We don't have a budget for this. This isn't our job description. They could have said, not my neighbor, but instead they said neighbor.

When I was there, the orphanage I visited had 1000 children and there were eight more with a thousand children each. And I've got to tell you, it was different from the great bulk of the countryside, among other things, in India. You know, they don't, treat cows the way we do. And so they don't drink as much milk. So when kids run, they sometimes fall down and break their bones. But inside the orphanage. They drink milk. Their bones are strong. They run, they fall, they're fine, their teeth are fine. And they've learned about Jesus and loved the Lord and sang magnificently for us in the middle of their school day. All because two people said neighbor and God called them. Now when you when you help people in that, in that fashion, sometimes it's just a deed that God lays before you do something right now. And sometimes you have to get organized and find helpers and get a team and create a team. They they're both ways of showing compassion.

You can show compassion to somebody who simply rolls into your life. They were hired. Where you work, there's in your class, they're in your neighborhood, they're in your club. Whatever your club might be. And you say neighbor. And other times you organize tens and hundreds, maybe even thousands of situations. People to show neighborly life. The key, of course, is compassion.

And one of the things you hear about sometimes is compassion fatigue. We heard that phrase. It's described when you've been asked to help and help and help, and you're tired of helping. So I've had the privilege this summer around, July 4th, of taking care of two of my grandchildren

for about nine days. And some of you know that my wife had surgery. This is now day 19 of taking care of my wife post-surgery on her foot. And who's counting? But it's 28 days now. Me taking care of people. And they're all really nice. I mean, my wife is wonderful and my grandchildren are mostly wonderful, and I've been taking care of them sometimes. Sometimes things go well, sometimes they don't go quite as well. For example, you might do a great job. I'm doing a great job with the dishes and the floor and the, I don't know, probably something else I'm doing. Well, I'm sure I'm doing well at something. And, and, and so I feel good about myself and I'm proud and maybe vain. Or I could get tired of hearing about needs. I mean, I still have a full time job, and you want me to do what? How about if you stop telling me what you want? Or, like, you know, four year old just crying, calling out in the middle of the night? It's easy to have selective deafness, isn't it? At times like that? Can I climb in bed with you, Papa? No, you cannot. Papa, I need this. Write it down. I'm for. I can't write. That's why I said write it down. But you can have compassion fatigue. So where do we get compassion? We get it from God. The very first time God describes himself in the Bible, he says, I am a God who is merciful and gracious, full of abounding in love. That's Exodus 34. And then we read earlier in our service today from Psalm 103. Favorite passage for many people the Lord is merciful and gracious, as a father shows compassion to his children. So the Lord has compassion toward those who fear him, to his children, his children's children. Because he knows we are like dust. He doesn't say, you're so weak. I'm tired of being compassionate to you. He says. You're so weak. I'm compassionate toward you. Colossians 3 Paul applies it to the church. He says, put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, tenderness, meekness, and patience bearing with one another. If anyone has a complaint, forgiving each other as the Lord is forgiving you, that is, it's God's nature. When you put on compassion, you're putting on the spirit of the one who loves you and saved you and unites you to himself. This is who we are in Christ, knowing God made in his image, and as a result, we become a neighbor.

But the biggest idea is that we need to see and then feel. So, you know, you have to ask, what can I see what? What are my gifts? How can I have compassion? Do something so you may be gifted academically. You become a tutor or you may become, gifted financially. And so you help people have trouble with their finances in school. It's the beginning of a school year in school. You know, there are a lot of students who learn better from their fellow students than they do from their teacher. And they listen in class and they say, what did you just say? And the classmate says, what the teacher is trying to say is this. And the fellow student says, oh, I get it now.

And that that is also an act of compassion, caring for your fellow student. You can coach people. You can notice people were in times of need. That's what the Good Samaritan did. He noticed he came and he helped. He put oil, which would be a balm. Wine and antiseptic. In those days. Put him on his donkey. He got off the donkey. You ride in the donkey. Took them to the inn, cared for him for a while, left in the morning with money and instructions. He cared for him concretely, and Jesus asked the question which of these became a neighbor? Now again, there's the form of the Greek. Greek forms are very clear. The form of the Greek is what's called a

perfect tense, which means became and sustained as a neighbor, not one shot, but becoming and remaining a neighbor, entering into a relationship, which is what many of us fear.

You meet somebody who's a little bit needing. You think I don't know? This person gives off a feeling that there's what I sometimes call a bottomless pit of needs, and I don't want to get too close. But remember, we're not supposed to define people in and out. Now, there are two extremes you can rush about and exhaust yourself trying to take care of everybody, every need, which is not feasible in this culture because we hear about so many needs and the other is should go the other direction and say, I'm out.

So, for example, is a tornado or a hurricane that doesn't become everybody's obligation. But maybe if you lived in an area that had hurricanes and you learned a thing or two helping clean up about hurricanes, you got compassion for victims of hurricanes or tornadoes. You became a neighbor by your experience. A link exists between you.

So let me illustrate from something that happened eight years ago in Nazi Germany. You know, that the Nazis tried to eliminate people that were, in their minds, a genetically inferior, and that included Jews. They killed 6 million in the Holocaust in a short span of time, and they killed gypsies. And they also killed people who had, Biological or genetic problems. We don't want them to reproduce. So altogether, the estimate is 13 million people were killed by the Nazis in a short span of time. And people often wonder, how could it be that Germany, ostensibly Christian nation, could allow this to happen? But others said, I want to study those who didn't let it happen. A man - Phillip Holly wrote a book maybe 40 years ago, by now called Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed, and he spent his time investigating those who did not cave in to the Nazis, but resisted the Nazis inaction. And he came to study a city, a small town really called Lush and born on the eastern border of France. And they would sneak Jews and gypsies out of the country at great personal risk. The Nazis began to detect that there's something like a road that people are getting out of France, which they controlled, and into Switzerland, which they did not control in the thousands. And the pastors led it, and they investigated, and they hauled the pastors in and questioned them and beat them and tossed him in jail, then release them and get somebody else from the town and try to press them. And nobody ever cracked. Nobody in this town ever told the Nazis what was going on. Not one person caved, and he questioned everyone and said, what is it? What was it about you that you risked everything for? Total strangers and the leaders said, we didn't do anything special. We just saw them in their need. But here's the thing there are Huguenots, Huguenots or Protestants living in France who endured centuries of persecution at the hands of the Catholic Church for a long time. Not anymore. And they saw them. They saw the Jews and the gypsies as simply people like themselves, who were persecuted for no logical reason. And so they said, we got to help. They're like us. That's the way God has made us. He made us so that we can find connections to people. If we're willing to open our hearts to compassion, a compassion that's like his, that's the way it works.

And if you are a little bit hesitant to think about yourself as a neighbor and a helper, can I just tell you a few things? It's the beginning of the school year. So, teachers, may I ask you not to see your students as students only, but as the neighbors God gave you this year? If you're in college or grad school, don't look at your classmates as classmates or rivals for the top honors. View them as neighbors. And if you're a designer and a builder or construction worker and you put up houses or buildings, don't just put up houses. Understand that the people who will enter those houses, those office buildings, your manufacturing facilities, are your future neighbors. You can't see them. That's one of the great problems you can't see them if you're in the medical field. They're not just patients or clients. They're the neighbors God has put into your practice or into your hospital. If you're an IT worker and you're trying to, maybe you're working on AI and everybody knows that we got to beat China to the great AI. Okay. But you might also be a neighbor who want to use AI safely and well, if you're in it, think of people who receive your product as neighbors, engineers, drivers, inventors, all the rest. But there's something even more important I want you to know. And that is that Jesus is the best neighbor we'll ever have. And he became our neighbor by the incarnation, took flesh and blood.

Now Jesus has his ways, and one of the ways he has is to tell stories. When people resist him, stories that kind of break down resistance and barriers, stories whose meaning is not clear right away, and stories in which the lead character is himself. So, for example, you know the story of the sower, which we looked at last time, and Jesus says, I'm the sower, so we're not the seed. Later on he says, by the way, that's me. I'm it's about how I do things. I so seed. And then there's a parable, probably the best known of all called the parable of the Prodigal Son, or better, the Lost Sons. And there's a father that runs to rescue the gross sinner and the proud, self-righteous person. And Jesus is the father, welcoming very sinful people and self-righteous people alike. And Jesus is the Good Samaritan. He's like those people, you know, those people who make movies and write scripts and TV shows, and the really big writers will say things like, well, I wrote this part. We needed a cranky, tough old woman. So I wrote this part with Judi Dench in mind. And then we need a soulful hero with flowing hair and dewy eyes. And he can be kind of skinny but tough. And so I wrote this part with Timothy. I don't know if it's Chalamet or whatever his name is. You know who I mean? The Dune guy. I wrote this part with Timothy in mind, and then some people like Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, write parts with themselves in mind. I'm going to write a movie, and it's going to be about me playing the lead role, okay? And I'll be his best friend. Now. Matt Damon and Ben Affleck got that idea from Jesus. Whether you know it or not, Jesus wrote stories with himself at the center.

And above all, he's the Good Samaritan, isn't he? I mean, wasn't Jesus playing the role, the Good Samaritan, that lawyer who was spiritually more than half dead, he was all dead in his pride trying to prove Jesus wrong? And who did he think was going to save him? I'll tell you what he was not looking for Jesus to save him or rescue him, but Jesus did come to save him. He said, let's have a dialog. Let me tell you a story. And this story leads that lawyer to Jesus. And I will tell you that we're all spiritually like that man who was beaten up. And left for dead. Would anybody here want to say I've never felt beaten up in life? We've all been beaten up and we've

all felt that we're half dead or all dead or mostly dead. And Jesus comes to rescue people who are beaten up and left for dead. That's what he does now. He doesn't just do it. In the story, Luke 9 says, Jesus set his heart, set his face, set his mind to go to Jerusalem. And he did get to Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem, he didn't just do nice things for people there. He continued to teach and lead his disciples, but he also died on the cross for the sins of his people. And then he rose again, showing he had defeated the powers of death and sin. And then he said, trust in me, and I will unite you to me. And by the way, you won't have to do anything to inherit eternal life. Just trust me and I'll give you eternal life. He came to rescue us. Jesus is the ultimate good Samaritan. If you're a believer, I trust that you know that and that and that the compassion of Christ that shaped him so that he rescued us also shapes you as you're united to him and you follow him.

So the Good Samaritan story can feel like a command do this and you will live. Love your neighbor and we should love our neighbors. But when we do so, all we're doing is following Jesus who loved us first. All we're doing is coming to the place to be willing to see the need, to feel the compassion and to fall in line with Jesus, who's good enough to redeem us, and also to give us neighbors whom we can love and care for.

Let's pray...

Father, thank you for sending your Son Jesus. Thank you, Lord Jesus for coming. Resolving to become our neighbor, to see us in our need, not pass us by, but to see us and then come to us and then feel compassion for us. As the gospel so often say, you saw people in need and felt compassion, and you felt pity. You felt mercy. You feel that even for us and you acted upon it, and you still act upon it. And so, Lord, we thank you for coming to us as Redeemer, as rescuer, you didn't define us in or out. You just saw us and came to us for all these things. We thank you and praise you. We do so in Jesus' name.

Amen.