

LUKE 210:25-37

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher", he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asked him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus said to him, "You have made the right answer. Do this and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him and went away leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The lawyer said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

ROMANS 13:8-10

Owe no one anything except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, *You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet;* and anything other commandment, are summed up in the word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

THE NEIGHBORS

Luke 10:25-37
Romans 13:8-10

State Farm's commercials are a staple in every major televised sporting event and they are usually clever and entertaining. No exception is the recent one which played often during the NCAA basketball tournament featuring former California governor and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger. It begins with a house on fire and a mother outside in the yard holding her baby to her breast as flames and smoke billow from her house. And suddenly out pops Schwarzenegger wearing his red shirt

emblazoned with “State Farm” who reassures her, “Like a good neighbaaa, State Farm is thaa.” And then you hear the director screaming, “CUT!” And the lens widens to show the burning house and the woman with child in arms standing there looking up with gratitude at Schwarzenegger. And the director says, “Arnold, it’s *neighBOR*,” to which he replies, “That’s what I said, ‘Neighbaaa.’” So they try it again with the same result. “CUT!” And in the uncut version which you can Google up, it repeats several more times with different scenarios ending with Arnold and the director arguing back and forth: “Neigh-BOR/Neigh-Baa” It’s hilarious .

The uncut version of this in my imagination has Jesus and the lawyer having their own debate. You know the story: a man is beaten and robbed and left by the side of the road with severe injuries. A priest and a Levite ignore him purposely passing by on the other side of the road. But then a Samaritan comes along (and this is intentionally ironic because Samaritans were regarded by Jews as second-class citizens, hardly worthy of being “Neighbors.”) who mercifully binds him up and transfers him to an inn paying for his room and care. And then comes the question you can fantasize the lawyer asking Jesus, “And who is my Neighbaaa?” And Jesus responding: “NeighBor!”

As the rifts between people in our country continue to grow wider, I think it has become an open cultural question of who qualifies as our Neighbor. Really! As Christians, do we even have to ask? Apparently, we do because it seems as if there are a multitude of people who are being targeted for discrimination. Migrants, I suppose, are the leading candidates who are being downgraded by some as “animals.” I wonder what Jesus would say about that. And following close behind might be the LGBTQ community which has been in the crosshairs of many lawmakers in numerous states. We could continue the list, but you get the point. The question is, what qualifications must be met to regard one as a Neighbor? And what is a Neighbor? Is it just someone living next door, on your block or in your apartment complex? Or do the parameters extend further than that?

Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan is a powerful teaching and Paul also bores in on it offering a dogmatic clarification on the issue: *Owe no one anything except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law...Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

Just as there are ironies in the parable, there are ironies in the corporate and educational spheres where the debate over Neighbors or

Neighbaas is heavily politicized. You may be familiar with the acronym DEI which stands for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. From a Christian perspective one would think this was an excellent summation of what loving one's Neighbaaa means. Oh, but nothing is that simple, is it? In the corporate world there are specific trainings available geared toward making the workplace more harmonious and fair. But jealousy and competitiveness have fueled pushback at many levels. Why do women get paid twenty or thirty percent less than men for the same job? Why is it that Catlin Clark will make \$80,000 for her rookie year in the WNBA and have an earning potential of \$388,000 over five years while Victor Wembanyana of the San Antonio Spurs will make \$55,000,000 over the same period? Where is the Equity in that?

And in the arena of higher education you get into conflicts over Admission policies. Most universities place a premium on Diversity which means they use quotas based on the race of incoming students and parental incomes to determine financial aid packages. So now we have issues over reverse discrimination—and oh by the way—the favoritism given to legacies. And on campuses themselves, Inclusion jettisons its way into national headlines as Jewish groups demonstrate against Palestinian supporters and vice versa.

Now all of this raises an interesting question. Does loving your Neighbors mean you have to like them? I suppose not. You don't even know the vast majority of your Neighbors so you make judgments about them based upon their politics, religion or sports team affiliations. That's just being human, right? But the question is how you **treat** them. It is all about respect for the other person's humanity. You need not agree with them or like them. That isn't the issue. Being a Good Neighbor is action oriented. As Jesus asked the lawyer, "*Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?*" The lawyer answered correctly: *The one who showed him mercy.* And Jesus simplified the entire issue with his response: *Go and do likewise.*

Reverend Thomas Dunlap June 16, 2024

