

Love Your Neighbor As Yourself

1. Warm-up: Culture has long placed a lot of emphasis on gender, but the truth is, most of us have traits commonly associated with both males and females. What is a personality trait of yours commonly culturally associated with maleness? What's a trait of yours commonly associated with femaleness?
2. Sunday's sermon was a panel discussion meant to broaden our understanding of what it means to be transgender and/or gender diverse. Some might wonder why we would discuss a "social and political" issue in church. To the contrary, Jeff suggested that taking the time to better understand the life experience of trans people is a deeply spiritual thing. Read Matthew 22:23-40, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. In verse 30, Jesus said that in heaven marriage will no longer exist and people won't have typical husband/wife relationships. Instead we'll be like the angels. What are the implications of that? Will gender matter in heaven? Will gender even exist in heaven? What do you think?
 - b. Why will marriage not exist in heaven?
 - c. In the passage we just read, Jesus identified the two most important commandments: (1) Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul; and (2) Love your neighbor as yourself. We have often heard that we should love our neighbor as ourself, but let's unpack that a bit. Read Luke 10:25-37, as printed on p. 3, then discuss this question: Who is my neighbor?
 - d. Who is someone you love as much (or more) than yourself. Based on that experience, what would you say it means to love someone as much as you love yourself?
 - e. What does it mean to love our trans neighbors as much as ourselves? On a practical level, how can we show that love?
3. A week ago Sunday, we studied another passage in Matthew's Gospel. There Jesus said that whatever we do to the least regarded among us, we've done it unto him. In that passage, Jesus gives examples of what that means. One of those examples is, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Matthew 25:35.
 - a. Stranger means "someone who is perceived as different; someone who is unknown to a particular person or group of people." By this definition, do you think trans people feel like "strangers" in American culture? Do you think they feel like "strangers" at our church? Why or why not?
 - b. What does it mean for each of us individually to be welcoming of trans people at our church? Give some specific examples of things we should (and shouldn't) do to be welcoming.

- c. Why do you think American culture is so fearful of trans people?
 - d. Why do you think churches have traditionally been so fearful of trans people?
4. Three of our panelists on Sunday are trans or gender diverse (Erren Hayes, Gina West, and Amy Townsend). The fourth panelist (Karen Steiner) is the mother of a trans child. A big part of loving our trans neighbors is listening deeply to their life experiences, so as to demystify their “differentness” and grow our understanding and empathy. So let’s dig deeper into what our panelists shared.
- a. By the way, just so we’re all on the same page, what’s the definition of “transgender” and “gender diverse?” Do both terms mean the same thing? If not, what’s the difference? (If you need to, use your phone to find thoughtful definitions.)
 - b. We asked each of our trans panelist to share how they came to the realization that they are trans or gender diverse. What did you take away from that part of the conversation?
 - c. Karen shared a bit about what it was like when her child came out to her as trans and what it’s like to have a trans child. What struck you about that part of the conversation?
 - d. We also asked our panelists for advice about how to talk to children about gender identity. Suppose a 7 year-old child were to ask you what it means to be trans. What would you say?
 - e. Sometimes we accidentally use the wrong name or pronouns for a trans person. Based on the advice our panelists offered, what should we do when we make that mistake?
 - f. Our panelists also offered tips about how we can be better allies and advocate for our trans neighbors. What did you take away from that part of the conversation? What’s something you intend to do (or do better) to be a good ally and advocate for your trans neighbors and church family members?
 - g. Is there something else from Sunday’s panel discussion that especially touched you or gave you a flash of insight?
5. Have you ever been close to someone who is trans or gender diverse? If so, tell us about that experience and the insights you gained from it.

Let’s each do our part to make LifeJourney a place that welcomes trans people in a way that will make Jesus smile for joy! “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Matthew 25:35.

Matthew 22:23-40

23 The same day some Sadducees came to him, saying there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, saying, ²⁴Teacher, Moses said, "If a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother." ²⁵Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. ²⁶The second did the same, so also the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷Last of all, the woman herself died. ²⁸In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her.'

29 Jesus answered them, 'You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ³²"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is God not of the dead, but of the living.' ³³And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' ³⁷He said to him, ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

Luke 10:25-37

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' ²⁶He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' ²⁷He 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 neighbour as yourself.' ²⁸And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' ³⁰Jesus 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. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He 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. ³⁵The 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." ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' ³⁷He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'