

## How Could This Happen?

On Sunday, we launched a new sermon series called “How To Neighbor.”

1. Warm up question: Tell us about the best neighbor you’ve ever had. What made them so special?
2. Hundreds of years before Christ, the ancient Scriptures told the Israelites, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Leviticus 19:18. But the ancient Scriptures left it to us humans to define “neighbor.” Naturally, we defined it as narrowly as possible. By the time of Jesus, many people took an attitude similar to that found in the writings of the Qumran Community: “Love all the children of the light and hate all the children of darkness.” IQS 1:9-10. The idea was, “I only have to love people who look like me, think like me, and live like me. They alone are my neighbors.”
  - a. If we operated on the basis of the Qumran definition of “neighbor,” what would be some categories of people you would be “exempt” from loving?
  - b. We humans tend to be “tribal,” i.e., we tend to gravitate toward people who are like us. Why? What gives rise to that tendency?
3. In Jesus’ culture, Jews and Samaritans were enemies. Jews regarded Samaritans as religious heretics who had intermarried with foreigners, creating a whole new blended ethnicity. Jews could not touch or socialize with Samaritans. Samaritans imposed similar taboos toward Jews. With this in mind, read Luke 10:25-37.
  - a. How do you think the victim of the robbery felt as he lay by the side of the road?
  - b. Why do you think the Priest and Levite failed to help their fellow Jew? What are the possible reasons? (Try to imagine yourself in their shoes.)
  - c. When the Samaritan first saw the dying Jew by the side of the road, what are some initial thoughts that might have run through his mind?
4. There are three key phrases in the Parable of the Good Samaritan that describe what it means to be a good neighbor. The first is found in verse 33. The Samaritan “was moved with pity” when he saw the dying Jew. **This is the 1<sup>st</sup> step for being a good neighbor: Practice empathy; imagine yourself as the other person.**
  - a. Jeff told how he once tried to kill a snake out of reflexive fear. His feelings toward the snake turned to compassion when he saw a friend carrying the snake and grieving its injury. Tell us about someone or some group of people that you have trouble feeling empathy for. Why is it so hard to feel empathy for them?
  - b. When we find ourselves hating someone or a group of people, what are some practical ways we can cultivate empathy for them?

5. The next step for being a good neighbor is found in verse 34: "He went to him." Instead of passing by on the other side of the road, the Samaritan drew close the dying Jew and investigated. **This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> step for being a good neighbor: Draw close to the person who is different from you; investigate and grow your understanding of that person.** Jeff told how he used to be prejudice against transgender people, until he became friends with several, learned about them, felt their pain, and realized how much we share in common. In your opinion, why do so many people in our culture fear and hate transgender people? For you personally, what changed your mind toward transgender people?
6. Professor Amy Oden suggests we apply the principle of "drawing close and investigating" to "political strangers." She defines "political strangers" as the kind of people about whom we find ourselves thinking: "How can they vote that way? How can they hold that position?"
  - a. When you hear this definition of "political stranger," who in your life comes to mind? Who's someone that feels like a political stranger to you?
  - b. Oden suggests that we see political strangers "not as enemies to be defeated, but as strangers to be welcomed and explored." She encourages us to ask them two questions: (1) How did you come to your view on \_\_\_\_\_? and (2) How is this political issue import in your life right now? "As we listen," she says, "we learn things that help remove people from the boxes we create for them." What do you think of her suggested approach?
  - c. Sometimes we even see church friends lashing out at one another in forums like Facebook over political and theological differences. How can we talk about our important differences without harming our "oneness in Christ?"
7. When we practice empathy toward those who are different, and draw close to better understand them, the final step in Jesus' parable comes naturally. Verse 34 says the Good Samaritan "took care of him." **This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> step to being a good neighbor: Take concrete action to help them.** Get involved; become their defender.
  - a. In 1996, a young black woman named Keesha Thomas draped herself over a KKK member to protect him from being beaten by anti-KKK protestors. Could you see yourself doing that? How do you think her actions affected the views of that KKK member?
  - b. To illustrate the kind of behavior Jesus is exhorting in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jeff showed two video clips – one of a tiger embracing a man out of joy and love for their friendship, and another showing the rescue of a stranded dog. What thoughts our feeling did those videos evoke in you?
  - c. Where in your life are you feeling called to be a better neighbor to someone who is different from you?