

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon Title: Just Neighbors

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### Scripture:

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#### Luke 10:25-37

#### The Parable of the Good Samaritan

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup> He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'<sup>[a]</sup>; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>[b]</sup>"

<sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii<sup>[c]</sup> and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

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**Transcript:**

The text from scripture today comes from Luke chapter 10, and it says this. On one occasion an expert in the law, that would be the religious law, stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What's written in the law?" Jesus replied. He answered, "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 love your neighbor as yourself."

And that last line, that's familiar, right? We've heard it. All of us have heard it. Love your neighbor as yourself. That means meet the needs of your neighbor with all the force, with all the speed, with all the power that you would meet your own needs. What makes them happy, makes you happy. What hurts them, hurts you. You want their kids to thrive as much as you want your own kids to thrive.

That's what it means. And that's really hard to do, isn't it? It is a radical, radical command. I mean I don't have time to love my neighbor as myself, because as it turns out, loving myself is a full-time job. And I'm working overtime at it, let alone, my neighbor and my neighbor's family and my neighbor's kids, because my kids, there's another full-time job.

I mean our oldest is out of college and has a job so she's off the payroll, but we still have two others in college. So out of three kids, so far, my wife and I have only managed to launch one fully functional adult. But the way I like to look at it is, hey, one out of three, in baseball, that's hall of fame. So we are hall of fame parents. But that's a lot of needs that I'm taken care of, and I don't know where I'm going to find time to love my neighbor as myself. It sounds kind of exhausting.

So the text goes on. "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied, "do this and you will live." The law expert asked about eternal life. And in the Bible, that phrase never means just after we die. It means living the eternal kind of life right here and right now. And Jesus says, "Loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself," as hard as that sounds, as difficult that sounds, that's what leads to the eternal kind of life here and now. A life of meaning, purpose, courage, hope and joy. Love your neighbor, love God. That's how you get there. Then, it says, but he, the law expert wanted to justify himself. I love that line, because I try to justify myself. Don't judge me, don't be mad at me. I'm a good person. Look at all the good things that I'm doing. So he asked Jesus, "And just who is my neighbor anyway, Jesus?" And I love this. "Yeah. Jesus about that love your neighbor thing, yeah, you didn't mean that literally, did you? I mean be reasonable, Jesus. I mean can't we shrink this down to a minimum list of the requirements? Like what's the least I can do to qualify for loving my

neighbor as myself so that everyone will think I'm a good person? What's the minimum requirement here, Jesus?"

Speaker named Gary Smally talks about one time speaking at a church, and he mentioned a study that showed that people who get 10 meaningful touches a day live longer. At which point he saw a husband turn to his wife and go, one, two, three. That's kind of this law expert like, "What's the minimum I can do, Jesus?"

And then Jesus says, funny thing that reminds me of a story. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was. And when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then, he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day, he took out two denari and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."

Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell under the hands of the robbers? And the expert in the law replied, "Tricksy Jesus, the one who had mercy on him." And Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." So the law expert wanted to shrink down the list of people he had to love to this minimal list, but Jesus won't let him do that. Because see, there's a reward in loving our neighbor as ourself.

This is what leads to the eternal kind of life now, full of meaning, purpose, joy, courage. There's a reward in loving our neighbor as our self. There's a blessing. So Jesus will not let him shrink the command because he loves this man. And if we shrink the command, we simultaneously shrink the blessing. So Jesus won't let us get away with it.

And Pastor Tim Keller, who recently passed away points out three ways that at least I and maybe sometimes you try to shrink this command about loving our neighbor as ourself. First, I limit the who of this command. Who exactly is my neighbor, Jesus? I mean what does the word neighbor really mean anyway? I shrink the who of this command mostly down to people I know, people I like, and people who are like me.

And that is understandable, right? It's like easier to help people that I know and people that I like and people that are like me. And that's part of why the Levite and the priest, religious leaders, the pastors of their day, part of why they passed the wounded man on the other side of the road. The text says he looked dead and in their tradition, that meant he was unclean and if they touched him, they'd be unclean too. So to avoid being unclean, they

passed to the other side of the road, even though they're religious leaders and they're kind of like as a way of I don't really see him. He's not really my responsibility. He's not really in my way. I'm on the other side of the road. He's not really my neighbor.

And then, Jesus has three words that would've infuriated everyone. Three little words that would've just enraged them, lots of angry emails because of these three words that Jesus says. But a Samaritan... Because, see, a Samaritan was the last person anyone in this culture would expect to be the hero of this story, because the Israelites hated Samaritans. Viewed them as traitors and heretics. Good Samaritan were not two, were two words that were never put together in this culture.

It'd be like if I said a terrorist was the hero of this story. But it's the hated Samaritan, the enemy who recognizes the man on the road as his neighbor. The law expert asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus response is, "Anyone in need." That could be a family member, that could be a friend or someone in another part of the world.

Second, I try to limit the when of this command. When I have more time, when it's convenient, when it feels right, when it sort of fits with what I'm doing, when, when? And I also try to limit how much of this command. I'll do it a little bit, but not very much. But again, Jesus loves us, doesn't want us to shrink the command because we shrink the blessing.

And so, he won't let us do that, because he doesn't just say this man is traveling on any old road. No. No. No. He names the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, which was a well-known road and it was called the pass of blood, because there were so many robbers, people were always attacked on this road.

And if you came across a wounded man, that might mean the attackers maybe are still in the area. And if you stopped to help, you would be attacked too. So the Samaritan here is potentially risking his life to help this man by the side of the road.

So the law expert was hoping to shrink this huge command down, and he ends up with even a bigger command than he started with because Jesus says, "Yeah. I'm calling you to help even people you don't know, maybe even people that you don't like, even at cost to yourself." And I'm sure the law expert was like, "Why did I even open my mouth?"

And yet, and yet, I think we'd all agree that if everyone in the world loved this way, the world would be a much better place, right? If there was a neighborhood, if you knew about a neighborhood where people were going to help you out, even if they didn't know you, even if they didn't like you, they were going to help you out, even at cost to themselves, you'd want to live in that neighborhood, wouldn't you? If you knew there was a church filled with people who would help you, even if they didn't know you, even if they didn't like you, even if it was your own fault, even if you brought it on your side, they would help you to the point

of taking some of your burden and putting it on themselves, wouldn't that be a church you'd want to want to go to?

But it's really, really hard to do. It's really hard to do. So then, how do we find the motivation and the power to love our neighbor as ourself? Well, there are two ways. One is stupid and the other is good. So the stupid way is guilt trip. If you don't do this, then you're really a bad person and you're not a good person, you're a bad person, and you don't like Jesus and you don't care about other people, and I bet you don't visit your grandmother either. Guilt, and pastors, we're good at it. We love the guilt trip, man. We are really good at it, but it's not just pastors.

Our secular culture does it to us all the time. If you are an enlightened person, if you are a good person, then you're going to care about other people in need and you're going to vote for the policies that help them out. And if you vote, don't vote for that policies, well, then you're a bad person. Guilt trip. As I said a few weeks ago, if anything in this sermon is making you feel like we are talking down to you or guilt tripping you, please talk to me. That's not what's in my heart. That's not what's in my heart. Guilt trip, ought, guilt, should, it just doesn't work.

I mean it might work for a little bit, but then it wears out. Every time I read this text, it reminds me of a time years ago when I was living in California and I was standing outside my house and a woman pulled her car over and asked if I would help her. Someone had hit a squirrel with her car in the road, and she wanted me to call somebody to help the squirrel. Who I was supposed to call? I don't... Like is there a squirrel ambulance? I don't know who I was supposed to call, squirrel EMTs to do little squirrel CPR. I don't know who I was supposed to call, but she was really upset.

So I went over to see if I could help the squirrel, but the whole time I was just thinking, "I don't want to do this. This is stupid. It's a squirrel, a rat by a different name." Besides that day, I was really, really, really busy writing a sermon on the Good Samaritan. Not this sermon, a different sermon, but still a sermon on the Good Samaritan.

And so, I went over it. I mean the squirrel was dead. There was nothing I could do about it, but I had this inner dialogue. I should want to help. I should want to do this. I'm a pastor. I should care about this. I should want... The squirrel is my neighbor. I should want to help that squirrel, right? Guilt, ought, should do not help us love our neighbor as ourself.

So what does? Oh, what is to realize who we are in this story? We are two people in this story. First, we are the wounded man on the side of the road. In the text, he has no clothes, which means his social status can't be determined. His age, his race aren't stated. In other words, he could be anyone. He could be a family member. He could be a friend. He could

be me. And sometimes it is me. Sometimes I do need help. Jesus is saying, "What if you were the one bleeding out on the side of the road? And what if your only hope was an act of free and costly love from your enemy, would you want that grace?"

If only if we think of ourselves as the wounded man on the ground, only then do we begin to look at people who aren't like us, maybe who we don't even like or don't even know, and begin to love them as we love ourselves, because we realize that could be me, and sometimes it is. I'm no different. I've been lazy. I've been sinful. I've made a mess of my life often through my own stupid fault, yet I was saved by radical grace from someone who did not owe it to me.

What's the motivation to love this way? Because I have been loved this way. The Bible says while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. When I was steeped in sin, Jesus didn't just potentially risk his life to help me, like the Samaritan does in this story, it cost him his life. See, we are not the Samaritan in this story. I mean, yes, Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." So yes, in a way we are, but at a deeper level, we actually, it's not the Samaritan, we are the wounded man on the road. Jesus is the Samaritan who helps us at great personal cost. And you can even see it in the text. The Samaritan saves a dying man through his sacrifice as Jesus saves us through his. The oil and wine he pours on the wounds are religious symbols that point to the cross and communion. The Samaritan says he's coming back just like Jesus says he's coming back. This happens in the portion of the Gospel of Luke that is aiming at Jerusalem and the cross.

The law expert in this story is asking, "What do I have to do? What are the rules? What's the law? What must I do?" But rules, laws, ought, should, guilt, they don't change our hearts, Jesus does. And the more we experience his saving grace and his saving love through prayer and worship and scripture and community, the more we're going to help others. This isn't about go try harder to be a good Samaritan and do good things. This is about experience more of God's love so that it overflows onto others. The second person we are in this story is the innkeeper. We are the innkeeper. Nobody ever talks about the innkeeper in this story. The Samaritan brings the wounded man to him and says, "Take care of him and I'll reimburse you."

In other words, there will be a reward. Jesus commands always carry a reward. When we love our neighbor as ourselves, we experience more of the eternal kind of life, more purpose, meaning, joy, hope, courage. Almost all of the high point moments in my life, almost all of the high point moments where I had experienced joy and hope and purpose and meaning have been when I have stepped out to care for someone in Jesus' name.

And often, I didn't even want to do it, but when I did it, I got back so much more. Relationships that matter, meaning and purpose, adventure, joy, we are the innkeeper in this story. Jesus is a Samaritan who brings us opportunities to be part of healing others. And just as the Samaritan says to the innkeeper, I'll reimburse you. Jesus promises a reward. And often the things Jesus asks us to do aren't even that difficult. Like the innkeeper in this story, he's not asked to make the highway safe or stop crime or solve poverty or save the whales. He's asked to care for one person for a little while. And if we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

And so many of you are doing this in all kinds of ways. So many of you are doing this in all kinds of ways. One of the ways we've talked about the last couple of weeks is to reverse the long-term effects of redlining and racial covenants that prevented minorities from owning homes and prevented investment in certain areas, in certain neighborhoods.

Now it's been illegal since the '60s, but the long-term effects still linger. Things like because schools are tied, school funding is tied to property tax, redlined areas still have those schools have less funding than others. Black and other minorities were prevented from owning homes, which contributed to a wealth gap. And we know you all care about this. We're not bringing this to you because we think you're a bunch of bad people who don't care about healing and don't care about justice.

It's quite the opposite. We know you care about it, and either, and you want to be part of healing this deepest wound in our nation's history, and either God's people are going to do it or our politicians are going to try to do it. But I don't have any faith in politicians on either side to actually heal this. I believe God's people can do this better than our politicians on either side.

And we've mentioned ways to do it. You could write a covenant about how you want to use your home for God's purposes. Community, justice, healing, you could write a covenant for that. Some of you as a result of this sermon series have started walking around your neighborhood or in some cases, your apartment building or assisted living facility and just praying for every house, every apartment there. Just walking around praying. Prayer is powerful.

In fact, this summer we're going to do a sermon series on the Psalms about the power of prayer, this summer. A while back, I came across a story about a school where there was a cafeteria where there was just at lunchtime, there were always all these fights at lunchtime. So a group of people from the neighborhood started going to that school at lunchtime, sat in the cafeteria, and all they did is prayed. That's all they did. They just prayed. And within a

few weeks, there were no more fights. That's the power of prayer to change a school, a neighborhood, an apartment complex.

The other thing we can do is just notice in our apartment building or our assisted living or in our neighborhood, just notice who's getting left out. Because yeah, redlining is illegal, but that spirit of exclusion can still linger. So who's getting left out? Maybe it's that senior citizen down the road or maybe that shut in or maybe the immigrant family that no one's really connecting with. Reach out to them.

Another way would be to put some or all of your money in a Black-owned bank that deliberately invest in under-resourced neighborhoods. These are just regular banks, federally insured, all of that. My wife and I are going to do this. This church is going to do a portion of our banking in a Black-owned bank to help invest resources in communities that have historically been left out. And if we all do something, one of those things that I just listed, if we all do something that could have a huge impact on our region. That could make a big difference.

One of our elders, who's a young adult, sent me an email about how he's trying to live this out. So let me read his email to you. He said this. "After college, my plan was to live at home for a few years, save money and buy a fixer up house to work on. However, God began to show me that it would be better to live in a bigger house with others rather than all alone doing repairs every night. Soon after that realization, I was listening to one of your sermons where you talked about a couple who'd offered very cheap rent to help a family in need.

Immediately I felt the Holy Spirit tell me that's what I was supposed to do. I viewed it as a tithe of my space and of my rental income. So I found a five bedroom house that had dropped in price despite the hot market, after praying about it was clear this was the right decision. So I bought it. A few weeks later at a gathering for young adults, I met a person from Africa who's part of New Hope, who needed a room and couldn't afford market rates. This person became my first roommate.

As rooms became available, I'd pray for God to send the right people to me. Often the people I would get were in uncertain times in their life, just getting back up on their feet and I felt God was using every room of my house to serve a purpose in their lives. Over the last few years, as I've grown deeper in my faith, I've realized more and more how all that I have, especially this house, is ultimately rooted in some blessing, I did not achieve myself, but was given to me by God. Even the ability to buy a house was possible because of the upbringing and opportunities that came from my family before me.



It all made me realize that this is God's house. I'm just his property manager. As I become more financially stable, I've offered more of the house to those God calls us to care for in Isaiah 58, the poor and the oppressed. Sometimes that's men providing housing for refugees. Currently, that means living with three immigrants from East Africa and Senegal who are paying well below market rate.

Some of my housemates have said that my home feels like a sanctuary of rest for them. And my housemate from New Hope is such a strong disciple of Jesus whose faithful habits and deep love of God, I've slowly absorbed into my own life. It's become a treasured friendship that has pushed me forward in my faith. Through it all, I have never once wished, I have never once wished, I have never once wished that I'd made more income from my property or wished I'd had the whole house to myself.

God has been so generous in providing me with friends, family, and the Bell Press community that more than makes up for any comfort I may have sacrificed in this process. And he's brought me joy and wonder that I never could have imagined."

He's like the innkeeper in this story. Loving others from all over the world that Jesus is bringing to him, not out of guilt, not out of obligation, but as a privilege of partnering with Jesus. And Jesus is giving him a rich reward of community and friendships and meaning and joy and growing deeper and deeper in his relationship with God.

Now, we all can't do what he's doing. That's not for all of us, but we can do something. We can pray. We can reach out to people who are excluded. We can write a covenant for our homes. And if we all did that, we're a big church. If we all did that, that's a lot of neighborhoods that would have more of Jesus' hope, healing, justice, and joy.

So where is Jesus calling you to be an innkeeper? To whom is he calling you to be a neighbor and bring his healing, justice and hope? For other people, yes. Sure. For other people, but also for yourself so that you can have more of the eternal kind of life now, meaning, hope, courage, purpose, joy here and now as collectively, we speak the name of Jesus over our neighborhoods. Speak the name of Jesus wherever we live, because his name is power, his name is healing, his name is life. And when we speak his name in word and deed, we see all the miracles that he can do.

So Jesus, thank you that you involve us in this. Thank you that you give us the privilege of being neighbors, of being innkeepers. Thank you that you bring us people to care for all around us. And Lord, we can't care for every single person, but show us who you're calling us to. Lord, who are you asking us to be neighbors to? And how are you asking us to do that? Lord, help us to do it. Help us to experience your love so deeply that it just overflows

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onto other people and see all the things you can do. We ask this in your name, Jesus.  
Amen.

## **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Icebreaker Question:** What is something new you learned or something you are thankful for after being part of this group for the spring session?

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last's week's sermon and scripture...How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**For Additional Information:** Please see [www.belpres.org/justice](http://www.belpres.org/justice)

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Has someone ever helped you out in a difficult situation when you didn't deserve to be helped or when the problem was a result of your own actions (or inaction)? How did you feel when they helped you?
- What motivates you to care for people in need?
- How or to whom can you be a neighbor this week?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing Group Prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.