

**Sermon Notes – October 4, 2020****“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”****Luke 10:30-37**

Any of you ever watch Seinfeld on TV? It's a TV series that was on TV for several years. It first ended in 1998 – now if you watch it, it is reruns. On the last episode of the final series, they ran a story based on “the Good Samaritan.” Jerry Seinfeld and his three other friends (Kramer, Elaine, and George) had gone on a trip to Paris. Jerry had just signed a contract with NBC to do a sitcom. One of the perks that they gave him as a signing bonus was a vacation trip to Paris, and he could take two or three friends. He took his three best friends. The plane had some trouble when it left New York and they ended up having to spend the night in Massachusetts for plane repair. They got off the plane and went to downtown. They were walking around, planning to eat dinner there, have a good time, and spend the night in a hotel. While they were walking downtown, they saw someone getting carjacked and being robbed. All four of them were innocent bystanders and witnesses to this event. (If you remember anything about the Seinfeld show, you remember that Jerry and his friends always ridiculed other people. It was just something about them; they made fun of people.) What do you think they were doing while this guy was being robbed? ... They were standing there making fun of the man that was being robbed. Kramer had his camcorder and was filming the whole thing! But none of them offered any help; they didn't call the police; they didn't even go try to help the man. After this happened, the police arrived. The police officer notices the four of them walking down the street and stopped them for questioning. He says, “Where are you guys going?” They said, “We're going to get something to eat.” The police officer says, “No you're not. You're under arrest.” They looked at him and said, “Whaaat? What do you mean we're under arrest?” He said, “Well under Article 223-7 of the Lakeland Massachusetts County penal code, you are under arrest.” “What is that? We haven't done anything!” Elaine said. The police responded with, “That's the problem. You didn't do anything! The law says that if you see somebody in danger and you can reasonably help or assist them, you must do it. So you're under arrest.” They were

sentenced to a year in jail for refusing to help somebody that was being robbed. The critics got real upset with that show, but I think it was based on “The Good Samaritan.”

I want you to think about it. This story has been around for a long time, hasn't it? “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” Even this lawyer in our gospel story knew the Old Testament law about loving God and loving your neighbor. He comes to Jesus and says, “Jesus, what do I have to do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus knew that this guy was an expert in the law – because a lawyer back then was not like a lawyer today. He was a lawyer who interpreted the Mosaic Law – the Old Testament Scriptures – and made it apply to everyday life. Jesus asks him, “What does the law say?” He tells Jesus, “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” This lawyer played a politician's trick – he wanted to find a loop hole – he wanted to justify himself. As Jesus is about to walk off, the lawyer asks, “Jesus who is my neighbor?” (What he was really asking was “who am I supposed to love?”) Now keep in mind Jews always believed that their neighbor was another Jew. That was their neighbor. He's trying to trap Jesus. He wants to see if Jesus says, “Love your neighbor” meaning all the Jews or love everybody else. If Jesus said love everybody else, the lawyer figured that would alienate some of the Jewish people and get them mad at Jesus. But Jesus doesn't fall for that debate and controversy.

Jesus tells the lawyer a story. A man is going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (about 18 miles). The terrain is rocky and thieves could hide behind all those rocks. This path was called “The Way of Blood” and you didn't want to travel there by yourself – but for some reason, this man had. He had been attacked, beaten, and left for dead. Three people passed by him – a Jewish priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. Keep in mind a Jewish priest was a mediator between God and man. He administered the sacraments in the temple. He didn't want to be unclean if he touched this man – because to them touching a dead body made them ritually unclean. He just wanted to avoid him, so he did. He passed on the other side. The Levite, who is an assistant to the priest in the

temple, looks at the guy and is kind of curious. But he still passes by on the other side. Reminds us a little bit of us, doesn't it? We see somebody and we're too busy; we've got our deadlines; we've got stuff going on; we don't want to get dirty; we don't want to get involved so we kind of pass by. But, then there is the Samaritan - and some of you may identify with this one. He saw a human need and he was moved with compassion. He goes over and he helps this guy. He bounds his wounds and pours oil and wine on him. (Did you know that the Jewish priest and the Levite also had oil and wine with them because of the temple activities? But they didn't do anything.) But the Samaritan did something -- this would have angered the Jews. You know why? ... because Jews hated Samaritans with a passion. Samaritans were considered half-breeds. They were the Jews that had gone into exile after Israel had fallen and they intermarried with some of the pagan Assyrians. They made their own temple and all kinds of things. They had desecrated the Jewish temple by bringing dead bones onto the temple grounds. There was a deep passion of hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans. And here was Jesus saying a Samaritan came to help this injured man.

I want you to notice in the story the lawyer's response when Jesus asked him, "Which of the three was a good neighbor?" Did you notice that he could not say, "The Samaritan?" He said, "Oh, the man that showed mercy." The lawyer was having trouble dealing with his prejudice in saying "the Samaritan." God calls us as Christians to care for one another and help one another - regardless of race or gender or nationality or religious preferences or whatever. **"A neighbor" is anyone in need - no matter who they are.** I wonder if the real question that Jesus was trying to get through to this lawyer was instead of "who's my neighbor?" - maybe it was the question "am I a good neighbor?" ***A good neighbor is sensitive and sympathetic to the needs, cares, and pains of others. They are compassionate, like Jesus. A Christ-like neighbor is compassionate and helps people where they can and however they can. They are generous, just like Jesus.***

There are some scholars that say the Samaritan in the story was actually Jesus. There are others that say, "No. The Samaritan could have been

any of us who were acting like Jesus.” That is what Jesus was trying to get across to the man in this story. ... Maybe we identify with the Jewish priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan. I want you to think about something else: What if you were the person in the ditch? How would you want to be treated? You would want someone to help you, right? Maybe Jesus is saying, “Go and do likewise.” How do you want to be treated if you’re in the ditch? I know that often I am like the Jewish priest and the Levite. I’m busy; I’ve got a deadline; I don’t want to take the time to help. Sometimes, I don’t feel like helping. And yet I have to remember that Jesus would always be there to help us.

I have a cute, funny story to tell you about a little girl. Her mother was trying to potty-train her. She was three years old. Her dad is at work, her mother is in the bedroom making the bed, and the bathroom door is open. The little girl is sitting on the potty. The mother overhears her daughter say, “God... God...” Her mother says, “Honey, finish your prayer.” The little girl says, “God... God... would you help me wipe?” After she chuckled, the mother calmed herself down and walked into the bathroom. The mother says (as serious as she can be), “Honey, God sent me to help you.” ***Sometimes God sends us to help others in need.***

There’s another story that I’d like to share. A University Professor had taken a group of students to serve at their local food bank for the homeless. They had served a meal and he had to get back to the University to teach. He was going to his car and he overheard a woman say, “Sir, could you help me?” As he’s opening the door he says, “Ma’am, I don’t have time” and he gets into his car. She said, “But sir, you didn’t ask me what kind of help I needed.” He looked up and turned around. She said, “Sir, my car won’t start. My battery’s dead. Could you jump start my car?” He said, “It kind of caught me. Here I was trying to feed the hungry. This lady wasn’t asking for food or money or rent – just a jump-start for her car. I am so glad I went back and helped her.”

I want to bring it a little bit closer to home. Back in January, I went to see the older couple that I’m close to in Henderson, North Carolina – Mr. & Mrs. Foster. It was the end of January. I was going Thursday-Sunday for

the weekend. It started snowing on my way there and somehow, I got a roofing nail in my tire on the interstate. My tire is going flat. I'm looking for the nearest service station. I had to drive five more miles to merge over the four lanes of traffic to get to the ramp where I could get off the interstate. When I got to the nearest service station, it was busy and I needed someone to help me. I was having trouble with the tire gauge and getting air to stay in the tire. I asked one man who was in a dress suit - a businessman - getting ready to go in the service station, "Sir, could you help me?" He said, "I don't have time. I've got to get to work. Bye." He left. I saw another man - a middle-aged man, driving a pick-up truck. I asked him for help and he responded, "I don't have time, ma'am. I'm sorry." I want you to know who helped me that day... there was an African American man who came out of the woods behind the service station going towards the store. I asked him for help and without hesitation, he came over and helped me. He was disheveled looking - young, probably 20s. I offered to pay him for his help and he wouldn't take a cent. He said, "No, ma'am. No, ma'am. It was my pleasure." Isn't it interesting how we don't have time? How we're always so busy? We are like the Levite and the priest sometimes. Sometimes we're like the Samaritan. ***Maybe we need to ask ourselves, "If I were in the ditch, what would I want done?" Jesus says, "Go and do like-wise."***

*Who is my neighbor? Anybody - no matter what their race or nationality or gender or religious preference - even if they are pagan - help them. What this Samaritan did was to live out what Jesus was trying to say and to teach. "Love your neighbor as yourself."* We assume the man was a Jew that was laying in the ditch - and it was a Samaritan helping him. There is nothing told to us about either man - but this Samaritan did not pay attention to whether he was a Jew or a Samaritan - he still helped him. Regardless of prejudice, regardless of what, he helped out. ***Maybe being a true Christian neighbor is caring about others, getting past the differences that traditionally divide us, and loving others unconditionally and without prejudice.*** The Samaritan showed us how to love our neighbor and showed the lawyer. Don't you notice that the lawyer is a little bit like us? When Jesus asked, "Who's the neighbor," he couldn't even say "the Samaritan." Sometimes we have to grapple with

our prejudices and grow with it. Thank goodness God is patient with us! The challenge is for us to be a good neighbor. Maybe it's not "Who is my neighbor?" but "Am I a good neighbor?" Maybe, just like that mother said to that little girl, "God sent me to help you." Who is God sending you and me to help this week? "***Go and do like-wise.*** Love your neighbor as yourself." And when we do, we are honoring God. Amen.