

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?
Luke 10: 22-37 –September 29, 2013
The Church of the Covenant

“Who is my neighbor?” is the question posed to Jesus long ago and it is the same question I pose to us as a congregation as we grapple with what it means to believe *“Mission IS Possible”*. I was invited to attend a picnic at the Highland Ridge neighborhood association up in the parklet sort of next to the Lemoyne Center. I had barely arrived under the small tents they had set up when a real “gully washer” struck, with driving rain, high winds; the kind of downpour that if you’re even out in it for a second or two you become drenched. So the small crowd sort of huddled closer and closer together, as the rain now began coming in horizontally under the tent. My navy blue blazer, grey flannels and penny loafers (Yes, beloved, that’s what I wear to a picnic!) became saturated. Squish, squish, squish went my penny loafers. Maybe we define community as that group of people who huddle together during the tough storms of life. I looked and we had circled around the mayor of Washington –not a bad metaphor for the day. Maybe we need to circle around more and criticize less? So someone got the bright idea to move to the Lemoyne Center (maybe it was the fact that the rain had now accumulated in huge pools on the top of the tents and it looked like the tents would collapse at any second!) so we ferried the drink and food to the cars (squish, squish, squish went my penny loafers) and then shuffled it into the Lemoyne Center (squish, squish, squish went my penny loafers again) and by this time there was no point in using an umbrella anymore. And, of course, you guessed it, by the time we had moved all the food to the Lemoyne Center of course all the rain stopped, the sun came out, and now the steam was rising from the baked parking lot and we were all perspiring profusely on the inside of the Lemoyne Center. What a way to experience community –I looked like a drowned rat with my blue blazer drenched, and slogging my way around inside. Squish, squish, squish! But at one point I looked out from the door and was stunned by what I realized --the Lemoyne Center is less than a block from The Church of the Covenant, just up Penn Street. I wasn’t attending someone else’s neighborhood association, I was attending MY neighborhood association. Community is realizing that all these folks are my neighbors. Who is my neighbor? The people living right over there!

The Good Samaritan must have also had an eye-opening experience in the story Jesus told. After all, whatever his plan was for the day you may be assured that it did not include stopping, changing his plans radically, adjusting his agenda and spending a lot of time helping someone he had never met before. I say that community ministry and mission is “messy”; its not neat and planned; it arises from what God places directly in front of us. We Presbyterians like to know exactly what we are doing and exactly where we are going all the time; we know what we’re doing six months from now. We get out our calendars and say, “No, I cannot do that 6 months from now; I am already overcommitted to do six other things.” When the priest and the Levite walk by the broken man by the side of the road, its not because they don’t care; its because they’re running late for an important meeting down in Jericho on averting violence in their community. (That’s called irony!) Unfortunately, Presbyterians, in order to become more missional we may have to set aside some of our own agendas and plans and open our eyes to see the very people God is setting right before us. The Good Samaritan was willing to set aside his time, agenda and day. But the priest and the Levite were not. Who is your neighbor? Open your eyes and God will show you. The Good Samaritan was the good neighbor.

The Good Samaritan must have also had an eye-opening experience AFTER he began his task of helping the broken man by the side of the road. This was definitely messy; the man who was set upon by thieves was bloody and broken; the Samaritan had to do a ritualistically unclean thing, dealing with the blood of a stranger, in order to help. Then its not just a simple matter; he takes the broken man to an

inn and the innkeeper will not help without cash money paid. The Good Samaritan not only bound up his wounds, not only set him on his own donkey (so the Good Samaritan had to walk), poured on oil and wine (using things he would have originally planned to use on himself), and *“And the next day took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper...”* (Luke 10: 35) This was not a one day mission project; this was a multiple day assignment from the Lord. And then the Good Samaritan says: *“Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you...”* (Luke 10: 35) Whatever it takes I will spend. Whatever amount of time it takes I will take the time. Whatever sacrifice it requires, I will make that sacrifice. However much it costs I will pay the price. Its an open-ended commitment. Whatever it takes to bind up the wounds of Washington I will do it. Whatever it costs to make a difference in the lives of those broken and left for dead alongside our society I will pay it. However much time it takes, I will give you that time. I surrender, Lord, to YOUR AGENDA. I surrender my time and my treasure and my talent and lay them at YOUR feet to bind up a broken world. Your SON JESUS went to a cross for me and did whatever it took to rescue me; how could I do any less for my neighbor? Who is my neighbor? The one who will do whatever it takes to bind up the wounds of people whom God places right before us.

The Good Samaritan must have had an eye-opening experience when he realized that God had chosen him to do this work. The holy and pious Jews, the priest and the Levite, were not chosen. The Samaritan was. The Samaritans as a people would be the Jewish “half breeds”, the people whom the perfect and holy Jews wouldn’t associate with. The Samaritans worshipped incorrectly; they worshipped on the high places, places associated with foreign gods; true Jews worshipped only in Jerusalem. To do ministry out in our community is messy; all those other people don’t worship the same way we do. Beloved, I’ve been in a lot of community worship services before and no one ever says: “Hey, let’s do a Presbyterian order of worship from the Directory of Worship. Let’s start with a written Call to Worship” Nope; its pretty much always a semi-holy-roller Baptist service when the church gets together and worships across denominational lines. So to be with others in community, to worship with our neighbors, might mean we feel a little uncomfortable, might mean there are people who worship differently than we do, might mean we have to temporarily set aside our view of what we think worship is in order to worship together with people who are different than we are. You know, a SAMARITAN –someone who dresses differently than we do, and is ethnically different than we are, and someone who likes to worship differently than a Presbyterian. To do community based ministry is messy; it means we might have to not only get outside our church walls, it means we might have to get outside our comfort zone.

When I was in Virginia I accidentally fell into a whole ministry to a bunch of Latinos. We sent Christmas gifts to the little Spanish-speaking children in our Network Preschool, a preschool for Spanish speaking children in our church. And one year as I was dropping off the gifts I thought I should really get to know these folks –that just dropping off a gift wasn’t enough. So I invited them out to dinner. No non-Latino I think had ever done this for them. So a whole group of Bolivians became my little personal mission field. Because you cannot just help one family from Bolivia; you wind up helping all their cousins and everyone from their village and eventually about 70 folks from one corner of Bolivia. I didn’t envision all of that; I was just there to drop off a Christmas gift. But there they were right in front of my eyes and my heart was opened and suddenly I became “El Patron” to all these folks. Yes, you have to pay a parking ticket because they will tow your car. Yes, you have to pay the penalty for your car being towed and you don’t have the money so here’s \$150. Here’s how to apply for a driver’s license and yes I will take you to the DMV. I became the “Norte” who would help. And by the way they would help me at the drop of a hat. They always set aside whatever they were doing to do what “El Pastor” asked them to. They would say, “I help”, and they would. But they never understood if I would try to say, “I’m sorry; I have XY or Z already scheduled.” They taught me what COMMUNITY really is. They taught me what

being a GOOD NEIGHBOR really is. We've forgotten what it is to be a Good Neighbor; and they had come from Bolivia to teach me what it was. By the way, they asked me when my birthday is and they showed up, 70 of them with food and guitars, rocking my quiet little townhouse community. ..until 3:00 a.m....when I had church the next day...and I was preaching. Being a good neighbor is messy. La vida es por la vida, they would say. The life is for the celebration of life. Birthdays in my ultra Protestant home were fairly quiet affairs –I'd open my present of socks or underwear and Mother and Dad would sneak up the hallway to light my birthday cake. So never did I have a birthday party like that one. And when I moved to Pittsburgh two carloads of Bolivians showed up unexpectedly to say, "I help". And periodically, without any notice, a carload will still show up, unannounced. Just because. Because community is community, and the life is the life, and we are all together in this, and they had become my neighbor. And over time I came to love and cherish them. Messy, as I say, is this becoming the Good Samaritan. I might just have to change. Messy, as I say, is becoming a good neighbor. I might just have to re-learn something like neighborliness that I forgot. Messy, as I say, is re-learning what COMMUNITY is all about. I might just have to set aside my own agenda; I might just have to take time I don't have; I might just have to care.

There is a profound word in the middle of the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus says that when the Good Samaritan saw the man broken by the roadside "*he had compassion*" (Luke 10: 33) The word in the Greek for compassion is "splanchnitizonai". Compassion means not sympathy, as in, "O I am so sorry that you are in pain". Compassion means empathy, as in, I feel your pain, I am willing to suffer with you, to get messy, COM, meaning "with" "Passion", meaning suffering. Suffer-with. I am willing to get so involved in this that I am willing to suffer with you. Compassion, by the way, is the exact same word that rests at the center of another of Jesus' stories, the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 20). The Father had "compassion" on the Prodigal Son. The Good Samaritan had "compassion" on the broken man. And Jesus, on the cross, broken by our sin being placed upon, nevertheless has compassion on us –"Father, forgive them..."

So who is your neighbor? Who is your neighbor? The one who is willing to set aside their own agenda and time for you. The one who is willing to surrender all and do whatever it takes and pay whatever the cost for you. The one who is willing to go outside their comfort zone and engage in mission and with people who from time to time are "messy" and who don't plan everything down to the last second and who look different and who worship differently. WHO IS YOUR NEIGHBOR?, asks Jesus. "*The one who showed mercy*"; the one who showed COMPASSION.

Open your eyes. Open your heart. Who is your neighbor? God will show you.

Then, O Church of the Covenant, when God does, then says Jesus –"*GO and DO likewise!*" (Luke 10: 37) And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*