

Luke 10:25-37

## The Neighbour

How do you define a neighbour? Is it someone who lives along side of you? Or do you have a broader definition of who your neighbour is or might be?

The scripture that you just heard read most of us know as the “Good Samaritan” story. It is probably one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. There are laws throughout the world and in Canada that are called Good Samaritan Laws that are based in this biblical story. As I researched to prepare for this message, I learned of a law in Canada that I didn't know existed. It is called, “The *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* [and] applies to anyone seeking emergency support during an overdose, including the person experiencing an overdose. The Act protects the person who seeks help, whether they stay or leave from the overdose scene before help arrives. The Act also protects anyone else who is at the scene when help arrives.<sup>1</sup>

There are some things the act does not protect against like more serious offences, such as, outstanding warrants, production and trafficking of controlled substances, and all other crimes not outlined within the Act. Hopefully those are not things you have to be concerned with but having said that, this sermon may have something to say to anyone that finds themselves in personally challenging circumstance when making a choice about helping someone or protecting ones own best interests, but we will get to that later.

Anyway, you get where I am going with this. The story of the Good Samaritan is one that has influenced recent crises and laws and so this parable is not foreign to most people even if they are of no faith or another faith tradition that has no ties to Christianity.

Yet could it be that naming this story “The Good Samaritan” we limiting the scope of the parable's depth of meaning? When Eugene Peterson titled this section of the scripture from Luke he went with “Defining Neighbor” and this may be more to the point of what Jesus was getting at as he had this discussion with the religion scholar. Let's go back to the beginning of that conversation.

Now a religion scholar was someone at the time who knew the Hebrew scriptures well. He begins with the question, “Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life? Well, Jesus being Jesus didn't answer him directly, but asked another question in response, the question being, “What's written in God's Law?” and “How do you interpret that?”

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<sup>1</sup> [About the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act - Canada.ca](#) Accessed July 8, 2022.

The scholar responds with an answer straight out of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, respectively. He knew his stuff, but there were also all these other rules that had been developed over time and some of it was about what made a person unclean and so not able to be with others and how that might affect relationships. One can learn about those things, but suffice it to say for our purposes that Jesus' teaching throughout the gospels seem to point to the problem these rules had created beyond what God had commanded.

And then the scholar goes that one step further that allows Jesus to tell a story that demonstrates the answer. The scholar, wanting to get a definitive or at least clearer answer about who might be considered a neighbour or as The Message says, "Looking for a loophole, he asked, 'And just how would you define neighbor?'"

Looking for a loophole. Even now we look for loopholes to define who is our neighbour. We like to think of our neighbours as those who live on the same block as us, whether we talk to them or not. We may have good neighbours or we may have what we call bad neighbours. We have the neighbours that come for coffee and the neighbours we complain about because their music is too loud or they are not taking care of their yards. If you live in an apartment or seniors complex your neighbour may have the volume on their TV or gaming console turned up to loud or they leave a mess, or they gossip.

Getting a little ahead of myself, let me share a story that can demonstrate what it might mean to help out this kind of neighbour. In a book titled *Can a Busy Christian Develop Her Spiritual Life?* Jill Briscoe writes:

Years ago, as I waited in line at a local shop, I heard the gossip. My neighbor's husband had left her. The night before he had packed his things into a van and driven out of her life.

I knew my neighbor casually. When we did speak, which wasn't often, it was about the weather. Our subdivision was the type where people led their own lives and neighbors didn't really get to know one another.

When I returned home, I struggled with what to do. Should I visit my neighbor, or pretend I knew nothing about her situation and go on with my day? In my mind I could see her sitting at her kitchen table, alone. She was in her fifties and the kids were grown.

Finally, I got up the courage and walked over to her house. When she opened her door, I said, "I heard through the grapevine that your husband left you last night. Can I do anything to help?"

Immediately, she burst into tears and said, “Come in. Come in.” I spent the entire morning with her – listening, putting my arm around her, and having coffee. But it was the start of a relationship.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of experience can be one that moves us away from gossip or being frustrated by a neighbour to learning about them, having conversations, building relationships, especially when we put their concerns ahead of our own for long enough to find out what their need is and how we might be present for them in that need.

But the story that Jesus shared went far beyond that. Here was a story of someone naked, beaten, unrecognizable, half dead, and left at the side of a dangerous road, known for how people could be robbed and taken advantage of. It was a road that one was wise to not travel alone.

Jesus says that two religious officials, one a priest and the other, with a little less authority than a priest, but still a knowledgeable and important member of the authoritative group of the Jewish faith, see the man on their respective travels and choose to pass by. Now I am pretty sure each did an assessment of the situation. They may have even felt badly that they were not taking time to tend to the man’s needs and I have read various reasons why each of them may have chosen to carry on, but the fact remains that they did not come near to help. They did not see this person as a neighbour.

Now the hearers of Jesus’ story would have been thinking, yup, first one didn’t help, the second didn’t help, but the hero is on his way. That is how stories work. So, they are waiting on the hero, but then the hero is someone from a group of people that these listeners have been disregarding and unhappy with for decades - along comes the Samaritan.

Samaritans were also Jewish, it was not like they were from some other faith, they just didn’t worship and do as those who were listening to this story did. One of *them* just couldn’t be the hero of the story. Please no! But Jesus wanting to drive home the point uses an unlikely hero who also would have assessed the situation and known the risks, and choose to act with mercy. It wasn’t that he was not concerned about his own safety, or the judgement he might receive at caring for such as this, or even wondered if he could afford to help with time, energy, and money, but decided that this is another human being in crisis and his own risk was outweighed by the need of the other.

And when you think of the man in crisis, he may have been grateful for the help, but he too may have wondered about his own safety with this stranger, whether or not being helped would by someone not like himself would put him in jeopardy in others ways, but gives himself over to the person in order to receive the care he desperately needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Larson, Craig Brian. Leadership Journal. *750 Engaging Illustrations for Preacher, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993, 1996, 1998. 2002. Page 379.

Whenever we reach out to another or allow someone to help us, we put ourselves at risk. Sometimes it is an emotional risk, other times financial or physical. Risk is what is involved when we broaden our definition of what being a neighbour means. Did you catch that? Jesus took us and the religion scholar, as well as all those listening to the discussion, from the question of who is our neighbour to what being a neighbour means.

When we look around us, whether from the front doors of our homes, work, or churches, who is our neighbour in crisis? and what would it mean for us to be a neighbour to them? In a time when our politics are polarized and wars reign, where people are not accepted for their colour, their gender, their culture, or are fleeing from countries where hate and fear or famine are raging, who would Jesus say is our neighbour and how are we to be the neighbour?

I can't answer that question for you but you do need to ask it of yourself. Are you willing to risk anything to be a neighbour to someone in need? Are you will to advocate for justice, for healing, for food, for a home, for acceptance of those who are very different, even at odds with your way of thinking or being in the world?

Jesus' final question of the scholar was "What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"

Which became a neighbor?"

The answer, the one who treated him kindly. The one who showed mercy. The one who chose risk.

Jesus said, "Go and do the same."

It is as simple and as complex as that. How much will you risk? This is not about being judged by another, it is about what you are willing to risk for God and for the neighbour. This risk will be what it is based on your physical, mental, emotion, and/or financial ability, but each of us has some ability to go beyond what who we are and what we are doing now to become a neighbour to someone in need.

May God grant you wisdom, courage, blessing, and grace as you go out into the world to show kindness, becoming a neighbour to those in need. Amen.