



Who is NOT my neighbor?

**Luke 10:25-37**

Rev. Dr. Michelle Holmes Chaney

Washington Street United Methodist Church

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Many of us are familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. It is one of the most demonstrative stories in the Bible, in that it clearly describes what being a neighbor looks like. But my question, posed in today sermon title is, "Who is NOT my neighbor?" Today instead of identifying with the Good Samaritan, would you be willing to identify instead with the priest and the Levite, who see a man in need, just as the Samaritan did, but instead chose to pass on the other side. Why am I asking you to do this? Because while many of us in the church are seeking to be the church, to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love our neighbor as ourselves, there are those in the world, and maybe a few in the church, who are more interested in deciding who is NOT my neighbor and determining who they willing to pass by on the other side.

To help us make this ideological shift from who is to who is not my neighbor, I go back to our friend the lawyer, who in verse 25 of our text decides to test Jesus. First with a question about how he can inherit eternal life to which Jesus responds with a question about what the law says because in Jewish Society there was no difference between civil and religious law, so the lawyer was an expert in both and the exchange ends with love of God, love of neighbor and love of self.

So, the lawyer knows religious law and yet asks a question that he clearly already knows the answer to. Hmmm. Jesus responds with a parable in which there are not one but two experts in religious law, who knew the law, who knew that loving God was closely linked to loving neighbor and yet they both see the man in need and chose to ignore him.

Why did they ignore him? The text doesn't say, but the story goes on to focus on the good Samaritan. So, what do we do with these two guys, who if it had not been for their unwillingness to help, we never would have gotten to the hero, the Samaritan? That is why I am asking you to stand in their shoes for a moment as one who sees need but chooses not to respond instead of standing in the shoes of the Samaritan who steps up and steps in. That is the comfortable place for us to be in this text. But I want you, just for a moment to stand with the crowd who doesn't want to help those who are not like them, who deem others social outcasts or rejects, who won't make time for anyone that doesn't immediately benefit them. Stand with the crowd that sees everyone not like them as other. Stand with the crowd who looks at another person and says, he or she is NOT my neighbor.

That's a really uncomfortable place to be isn't it? Well welcome to the world in which we live. Welcome to the world that we as disciples are called to be Christ in front of and to see and treat as a neighbor. A world that passes by the one in need because that person is not their neighbor. That doesn't sound like a fun place to be does it? I know you are right now just itching to step back into the shoes of the Samaritan, the good guy, the hero.

But I ask your indulgence because we as the church cannot be naive about the world we have been called to serve and make disciples. We need to be clear what we are up against, the challenges that are present and the obstacles we must work through. No one said this work of Christ would be easy. In fact, the world is making it harder and harder.

So now, step back into the shoes of the Samaritan. Ahhh, doesn't that feel better? Doesn't that feel more natural. Doesn't that feel right? Now we can go back to this story of the Good Samaritan, seeing him as the hero, recognizing the tremendous impact the life of the Samaritan has through this story but all on the social norms of the world. You see with one act of mercy and compassion Jesus establishes the standard for neighboring.

Being a neighbor is the demolishing of all boundaries, or race, religion, class, culture, ethnicity, wealth. And simply seeing one another as who we are, children of God. We as the church do not seek to separate and determine based on social norms and mores who is NOT my neighbor. It's just the opposite, we go into the world and share God's love not with a chosen few, but with everyone. Our neighbor is anyone we are privileged to see, to meet or to know. For us neighbor is not about geography or demographics, it about love. Love God. Love Neighbor. Love self.

Why did I take a detour with this story, you maybe wondering? Because even though the priest and Levite don't get much attention in this story, don't think there aren't priest and Levites in the world today, based on their actions or inactions. But we friends, are the good Samaritans sent to show a better way. To show what mercy and compassion looks like. To show what being a neighbor looks like. To show the love of God in Jesus Christ in a dangerous and challenging world. But guess what! We do not do this alone for God is with us, Jesus is modeling the way for us, and the Holy Spirit teaches, reminds and comforts us along the way.

So go, go into all the world and make disciples. Be the best version of good Samaritan you can possible be. Be willing to go above and beyond, to move out of your comfort zone, take risks and be bold, for you know who is your neighbor!