

**A God-Lived Life**  
**Sample Sermon – Month 1**  
Luke 10:25-37

**Jesus Makes Us Loving Neighbors**

Ok, word association game. What's the first thing that pops into your head when I say: "Good Neighbor?" I'm going to go out on a limb and say 85% of you or better thought "State Farm" or "Jake, from State Farm," or had a particular jingle going through your head, "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there." If you believe the seemingly ubiquitous commercials, your State Farm rep is the neighbor you want. Jake is there. When something goes wrong, he's there to help. When there's a risk, he's there to warn. When you need him, day or night, he's just a phone call away in his khakis and polo, ready to help.

But, this is not a State Farm commercial. This is real life. By the end of this sermon, I hope your picture of a good neighbor is a little different. Instead of seeing khakis and a red polo attached to a voice on a phone, I hope you'll be seeing someone a little closer to home—you. Today, Jesus makes us good neighbors. In fact, let's go a step farther and help define what a good neighbor is. Today, **Jesus makes us loving neighbors.**

He does that first by *teaching us what a loving neighbor is*. Then he *shows us what a loving neighbor is*. You've heard the story in our Gospel Lesson before: the Good Samaritan. I mean, even unbelievers, even the biblically illiterate know about this story. After all, there are *Good Samaritan* laws on the books, and they are called that—a biblical name. There is a recognized value to being good to people and doing the right thing, even if you don't know them. But today, Jesus uses this story of the Good Samaritan to teach us much more. And as you heard in our reading, he's actually using the story to answer a question.

While it starts with this expert in the Old Testament "testing" Jesus, pretty quickly it puts every one of our hearts to the test, doesn't it? "**What do I have to do?**" the lawyer asks. Our hearts know that question. Whether it's the student trying to figure out what will get her a passing grade or the employee looking for the raise, or the spouse trying to figure out what will ease the tension—our hearts know that question. "What do I have to do?"

Now, Jesus makes clear that the answer to that is easy. Do the right thing. God has given pages and pages of his law. It's pretty simple. Just do it. And the lawyer realizes that. He understands what the law says. I mean, look at his answer. Even Jesus says it's a great one. Verse 27: "**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.'**"

But notice what happens when Jesus agrees to that. The lawyer feels he needs to justify himself. Do you understand where he's coming from? God says it's simple: love. And we say, "Yeah, but, what about ..." and then you finish that sentence with 100 different things. "Yeah God, I know I'm supposed to love you, but what about when that's not really convenient? What about when my life is so packed and my budget so tight, that I really have to take care of myself first? You can't really be asking me to sacrifice then, can you?" Or "Yeah, God, I know I'm supposed to love my neighbor, but what about when they're not that lovable? What about when I don't feel like they love me?"

That's the one that the lawyer spoke out loud. The way he phrased it: "Yeah, I hear you saying love my neighbor, but ... **who is my neighbor?**" Do you see what this is asking? Do you see what he is

trying to do with God's law? He's trying to find the loophole. He's trying to lower the bar to one he thinks he can reach. "God, you can't really expect me to love everyone, can you?" "Where is the line? There are some I can make excuses for not loving, right?"

That's when Jesus tells the story. He had to. Just saying the words, we would've tried to redefine them. You see, our sinful pride has infinite ability to rationalize and excuse and be selfish. We even try to do it with the law. We make the law about me: What do I have to do? What's in it for me? What's my reward?

And Jesus teaches that it's not about us at all. Those are the wrong questions. The answer is that it's about God (why I do it), it's about love (what I do), it's about others (who I do it for—not for me). And until I see that, I will be banging my head against the wall of trying to do the right thing for the wrong reasons and making even the right things wrong.

Go back to the student, employee, or spouse I brought up before, trying to figure out what they need to do. The answer for the student is not memorizing a set of data points that will get her a good grade. It's the process of studying the material, all of it. Then she grows smarter and learns to learn and the grades become a byproduct. For the employee, the answer is not a few random "good deeds" that catch the boss's attention. When he just goes all in to doing a good job, being a good employee, the promotions come, not by chasing them—and there's a whole lot more fulfillment then. For the spouse, there's not a checklist. It's a way of life—sacrificing, showing kindness, love—not so that you get something out of it, but because you want to love. And guess what? That does get noticed.

The neighbor we are to be concerned with isn't them—it's us. It's not about "who is my neighbor?" It's "am I a good neighbor?" And that isn't limited to those I like, or those like me. That isn't limited to those it's convenient to be a neighbor to, or even painless. Being a loving neighbor hurts sometimes. It takes sacrifice.

The priest in the story wasn't willing to sacrifice to help. And there were laws. If the man died, the priest would have been unclean and unable to do his job. He had his excuses. But it doesn't matter, does it? Anyone who heard the story Jesus told would not say the priest did the right thing.

The Levite in the story—he passed by too. Now, he had his excuse, right? He's following his leader, that priest. Of course, you want to please those human representatives of authority. But, same thing—anyone who heard the story Jesus told would not say the Levite did the right thing.

It was the Samaritan—the Jews' natural enemy, despised by the Jews and hated, and the national feeling was mutual. Think Gaza Strip, Palestine-Israel hostility today. It was the Samaritan—the one who you would least expect to be "good" to that Jew. He didn't consider all the reasons he had not to help. He didn't ask the question, "How does this affect me?" or "What would this guy do for me?" He just loved. He sacrificed. He went out of his way to help that man who would've run away from him if he could've. That's the level of hostility and racism there. But that Samaritan used all his resources: bandage, oil, wine, money. He put the man on *his* donkey, and he walked and led the donkey. He gave the innkeeper *his* money and was committed to following it through. Those aren't the kind of things you're going to do when the law is all about me. That's not what you're going to do when you're asking questions like, "What do I have to do?" or "How much is enough?"

That kind of activity only comes when **Jesus makes us loving neighbors**, when we realize that the law is love for God and love for others, not love for myself that I use love for God and others to benefit. How does he make us loving neighbors? Well, yes, first he teaches, like here, to make us see our way isn't the way. And then he shows the way.

In the story, it was the Samaritan that saw the man injured and wounded and didn't pass by on the other side. He risked his life. He gave his resources, his time. He loved. In real life, that teller of the story, Jesus, saw us injured and wounded. For all the times we've been selfish in our view of the law ... For all the times, we've made excuses instead of loved ... For all the times we've tried to rationalize away God's expectations—in other words, for all the times we've sinned—we are as spiritually helpless as that beaten man on the side of the road. And Jesus saw us. From all eternity, he saw us, and he set aside the pleasures of heaven for a time, he gave up basking in his prestige and glory and honor—to put himself at risk. No, more than that—he did more than risk. He came here to go without a place to lay his head, so that he could prepare our place; to go without food himself so that he could give us the bread of life; to die so we can live. **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).**

Do you hear that? He was love. He was the loving neighbor who did for us. And he succeeded. He made us what we weren't. By paying our price and substituting his perfection, Jesus makes us loving neighbors. That's how he can close our text how he does. Verse 37: **“Go and do likewise.”**

Be a loving neighbor. And if you're looking for some ways to do that, if you need to be challenged to get yourself out of those old habits of only being loving to the loving—check out your commitment cards. You should have received one with your bulletin. If not, there are some more on the information table. There are some great ways to show love there—both individually and working together as a congregation. Our congregation is doing a community food drive in a couple weeks. It'll mean giving of your time, but that's love. There are a couple of opportunities on there that are tentative based on the whole Covid situation—but commit to them anyway and we'll find a way to make them happen eventually. But really—it all comes down to learning what Jesus is teaching today. Being a loving neighbor is certainly not making excuses so I don't have to do something. And it's not even just doing things. It's doing things out of love.

May God grant you grace to see that love in Jesus and live the God-lived life, serving others.

In Christ,

Amen.