

Who Is My Neighbor?

Good morning, Trinity. I greet you in the name of the Risen, Reigning, and soon Returning Lord Jesus Christ, whom we have just sung about. I also greet you from Mission to North America, which is my home mission sending agency from the Presbyterian Church in America, Bible Believing Presbyterian Church and my own home church in Seneca, South Carolina. Oconee Presbyterian Church, greets you in the name of the Lord and am so thankful for this church and for the support that I and my brother, Pastor McCracken, have received so far.

I will say this before we begin. My wife tells me that I'm going blonde, that my hair is not white. And I also will say that apparently it only started happening after I met Pastor Andrei. So let's turn our attention to God's Word. If you would put your finger on Luke chapter 10. Luke chapter 10. And I'll begin reading in a moment, starting at verse 25.

But let's pray together. O gracious God and Father, we lift our hearts unto You, the living and true God, the only God. And we bless Your name. We bless Your name for the great privilege that we have as Your children and as Your servants to worship You Sunday after Sunday, to lift our hearts unto You in Your worship and Your praise, the honor which is due to Your holy name. And we thank you also for the privilege of being living sacrifices throughout the week, of offering up sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to You with our very lives as we honor and glorify the One who died for us and who reigns now over all things for us. We pray that as we come to Your Word, that You would seal its truths upon our hearts, that You would build us up in holiness and righteousness and in assurance of Your love for us, that You would help us to remember what You have said to us so many times in Your Word, that You are with us, that You will not leave us nor forsake us, and that there is no condemnation to those who are in Jesus Christ. We pray now that You would set our hearts and our minds and our affections upon You as we hear from You in the preaching of Your Word. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

There are some moments in history when history intersects with our own lives that we cannot possibly forget something that has happened. I think, for example, in my own life of the Challenger explosion in 1986. I was very young at that time, but the Lord impressed that upon my heart as a major event not only in my life, but in the history of our country.

Perhaps some of you will remember the John F. Kennedy assassination. And that is a watershed moment in your own life, in the life of the country.

Well, something happened on January 8, 1956, that I believe all of us should know about, whether we were alive at that time or not. A very important event in the history of the church of Jesus Christ. January 8, 1956 five missionaries laid down their lives for Christ and the Gospel in the Ecuadorian jungle. Jim Elliott, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, and Roger Yadarjian laid down their lives for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Their mission was to bring the Gospel to the Auca Indians, also known as the Wodani tribe. Known for its brutal culture of generational revenge killings. Someone would kill someone, and then the loved one of that person would feel that they must, in order to establish their honor, kill the one who had killed their loved one. And it kept going and going and going and going,

generation after generation. A cultural prison, as it were. People entrapped by the dictates of the word of man rather than the Word of God.

The last words of Nate Saint, the pilot of that missionary expedition, as he lay on a beach beside the mission plane, his last words were in the Wudani language. Do you know what he said in the language of those who were killing him? He said, "I am your friend. I am your friend."

Jim Elliot had a gun with him that day, but he did not fire it. And the reason was simple. You need a gun in the Ecuadorian jungle. There is a lot of wildlife that might harm you. But the men had agreed that no matter what happened, they would not kill the Waudani, even if it meant being killed themselves. When Nate Saint's young son Steve, asked his father why they wouldn't use their guns, Nate simply replied, because "we are ready to die, Steve. But the Waudani are not."

The Bible teaches us that if we are in Christ by a true and living faith, we cannot, we must. I should say, we must live as those who don't cling to our own lives, but rather who cling to Christ, who is Himself our life, we are able to say, even with some trepidation and fear, we are able to say, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

It's that liberating thought that compelled these five young men, some of them married with children, to give their lives for a tribe, at least at that time, of vicious killers, to lay down their lives for their enemies. The news of their death traveled around the world. Many asked if they gave their lives in vain. Many asked if they were foolish, if they were naive. Many accused them even of agitating the Waudani and in that way bringing their deaths upon themselves. But the answer to all of that comes in Jim Elliot's own words that he had written years before. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose."

For those of you who know the rest of the story, Jim's wife Elizabeth, would go on to take the Gospel to the very tribe that killed her husband. Through her ministry and through the ministry of others, the Waudani began to learn that Christ came to give His life for those who despised Him, for those who put Him to death. They learned of a love that came down from Heaven to seek and to save sinners who hated God and had no desire for His friendship and for His love.

With all of that in mind, let's turn to our passage this morning. Luke, chapter 10, verses 25 to 37. Hear now God's inerrant, infallible, inspired Word, "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to Him, what is written in the law? What is your reading of it? So he answered and said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. And He said to him, you have answered rightly, do this and you will live. But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor? Then Jesus answered and said, a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now, by chance, a certain priest came down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion." Remember, this is what is said so often of Jesus, isn't it? He was full of

compassion. He had compassion. "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you. So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he said, he who showed mercy on him. Then Jesus said to him, go and do likewise."

The question before us this morning is a simple one, but one with vast implications for us. The question is, who is my neighbor? Who is my neighbor? Who is my neighbor? We'll consider that question this morning by asking three prior questions. First, what does the law require? Second, what hinders me from keeping the law's righteous requirement? And finally, what would Jesus have me to do? And when I say me, I also mean you. What will Jesus have us to do?

Let's look at our first point. What does the law require? And the first thing that we want to take a look at is simply the context. Jesus has sent His 70 out to preach the Gospel, urging them to pray for even more laborers, for the great harvest. "The harvest is great, but the laborers are few." That's verses 1 to 16.

The 70 return with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us. In your name. What does Jesus do at that point, He warns His disciples not to get too full of themselves. Not to get too full of themselves and what they have done, what they have accomplished, but instead to rejoice. Because why? Your names are written in heaven. That's the main thing, isn't it? That's the main thing. Not what you have done, not what you have accomplished. Not sitting on my right hand or on my left hand. Some great status in my kingdom, but simply this. Your names are written on the Lamb's book of life in Heaven.

He goes on to tell them how privileged they are, not because of the great things they have been enabled by Christ to do, but rather because they have heard the Gospel and they've been witnesses of the ministry of God in the flesh. You, dear brothers and sisters here at Trinity Church, are a privileged people. You are privileged beyond all measure. You are so greatly privileged. You are privileged not because of anything that you have done, not because of anything that you are in yourselves, but you are privileged because you, if you are in Jesus Christ, you are a child of the living God. A member of the kingdom of God, a member of the church of Jesus Christ. But remember this with great privilege. There's no other people on the face of the earth that are as privileged as the people of God. But with great privilege comes great, great responsibility.

So the question for us this morning again. Who is my neighbor? Who is my neighbor? There's a test that comes now. A test. Satan will often test his church in times of great blessing and prosperity. I'm sure this church has experienced this. I'm sure, Pastor Andrei, you have experienced this. That great testing and trial come in the very moments when you thought I was on the mountaintop of spiritual blessing. And then the test came. Satan so often comes in that moment.

Test comes now in the form of a lawyer, someone whose entire job it was to know and to interpret the Old Testament law. And this lawyer tests Jesus with a question. His question is this, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Or perhaps his emphasis was, what shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?

I want you to notice how Jesus responds. This lawyer is seeking to test Jesus. But what happens? Isn't this so often what happens? Jesus tests the lawyer. He answers the question with a question of His own. He says, "what is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" He brings this lawyer right back to the very point of his own personal area of pride. You know the law. What is your reading of the law?

And I think we need to learn something from what Jesus does here. He doesn't answer the question directly. So often we're tempted as perhaps an unbeliever comes to us with questions, and we want to get right to the heart of the matter. And so we answer the question directly. But Jesus is so much wiser than we are. He wants the man to think for himself. He deals with him as an image bearer of God, one who is capable of understanding revelation from God and understanding what that revelation from God means for him personally.

And not only that, but he's a student of the law. Here was someone who knew the Word of God better than almost anyone else alive, at least intellectually, academically. How will this man respond? "So he answered and said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." Verse 27.

Now, what's striking about this, perhaps you've already thought of this, is this is the exact same answer that Jesus Himself gives when He is asked, what is the greatest commandment? Love God. And the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself.

Here is where Jesus answer could be very surprising to us, especially for those of us who have been Christians for some time, those of us who have been well instructed, as I know you are in this church. This answer could be very surprising to us. We know that salvation is not by the law. We know that no amount of human works or human energy or human merit can ever be sufficient to earn eternal life.

We think of our first parents, Adam and Eve, cast out of the garden for a single sin, banished for a single sin. A sin that though we might look on it as a small thing eating a piece of fruit was actually a manifestation of the rebellion that was in their hearts. And because it was a sin against God, it was a sin against an infinite God, a sin of infinite magnitude and therefore requiring infinite punishment from God.

Jesus. Jesus, at this point, interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, seems to grant this lawyer's premise. Did you notice that He seems to grant the lawyer's premise that eternal life is the reward for that man who is able to love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. He grants the premise, doesn't He?

In my notes, the word man is capitalized. Eternal life is the reward for that man, singular man, capital M, who is able perfectly to love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. And that man, of course, is standing in front of the lawyer.

That had always been the sum total of all that was required of Israel under the law. And Israel failed again and again and again. And every single member of the nation of Israel failed again and again and again, particularly in their love for God. Idolatry was so much the characteristic sin of the nation. It had always been the sum total of all that was required of Israel under the law in the whole Old Testament was the evidence that no man, except the capital M, man, can ever keep the law of God.

Jesus now has this man's attention, though. But now it's time for the man to see, to begin to see the hardness of his own heart as clearly as Jesus sees it. Because Jesus knows the hearts of all men. He knows this man's heart. He knows your heart. He knows my heart.

So our second point is also a question. What hinders me from keeping the law? What hinders me from keeping the law? Look with me at verse 29, where we find the lawyer's question. "But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor? Who is my neighbor?"

Why does he ask this question? Well, the text tells us so clearly that he was wanting to justify himself. He was wanting to excuse himself. How often do you and I, even as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, seek to excuse ourselves?

He was able to identify the fundamental principle underlying the whole law of God, that principle that revealed man's relationship to himself and to other human beings. Love for God, the basis of all other expressions of love. This is why the world gets love so wrong. This is why the world around us has no real understanding of what true love is. Because they begin at the wrong place. They don't begin with God. They don't have God as the supreme reference point for everything. And especially for how we are called to love. But he's able to identify the fundamental principle.

Love for God to love one's neighbor rightly and truly, he seems to understand one must first love God with the whole heart. But now this man's self-centered question reveals not only a lack of love for his neighbor, it reveals that he doesn't truly love God, the God that he professes to love as he ought.

I want to share with you how God confronted me with this very reality in my own life. I spent 15 years of my life in prison. Ten of that in solitary confinement. In solitary confinement for my membership in a racist prison gang. A gang that I joined because number one, I was asking myself the question in prison, how am I going to survive? And the only answer that seemed available to me was I need to find someone who will accept me and someone who will be a quote, unquote brother to me. And that's what the gangs offer in prison.

You see, they offer brotherhood, they offer love, but it's false brotherhood and it's false love. But I didn't know that. I was 19 years old. I had to find that out the hard way. Years later, in a solitary confinement prison cell, the Lord used a radio program. I had a little clear plastic radio.

Why was it clear? Some of you know the answer to this. It was clear because that's one of the places that you would hide contraband. And the officers needed to be able to look right into it and see that there was no contraband. And that radio was God's instrument. That radio was God's means of salvation for me.

And do you know what He delivered me from that very day? There was still so much growing that I needed to do. There were still so many sins that I didn't even realize at the time were sins. But God dealt with me on that sin of racism. I had been told that that man over there who looked differently from me, that man over there who was in many ways different from me, yet nevertheless, still a man, still made in God's image. I had been told that he was my enemy. And I had been told that if there is ever a time where we need you to stay down, was the terminology, to fight, you better be there. You're with us. You're not with them. They are your enemy. That was my life for years.

And the Lord delivered me out of that in a moment, in an instant, He took it all away. And He taught me by His Word and by His Spirit that He is God, that He is creator God, that He has made all the nations that He has made every individual. Each one is His. And not only that, but if I was going to be a member of Christ's body, I would have many others of many different kinds and categories that would be worshipping together with me. And do you know my first response to that? Because I was so wrapped up in my identity as a white supremacist. That's what I was. That's who I thought that I was. It was my identity. I identified myself. Now I know with my sin. That's who I thought I was. And so you can understand why I didn't think there was any way that I could change. How can I change what I am? I can't do that. That's a question that some of your neighbors are struggling with right now. And the answer came from God himself.

As I struggled, I realized I am going to hell for my sin. And it was in that moment of realization that God Himself in a moment changed my heart, took the hatred away and poured out His love. Love for Him and love in some measure for others, though it still needed to grow. He showed me Himself and He revealed to me who I was, that I might see His glory, that I might see Jesus Christ. And seeing Jesus Christ, that I might have life. And that more abundantly. And as the old hymn goes, my chains fell off. Even in prison. I rose, went forth, and followed Thee. This is what God confronted me with. Perhaps. Perhaps God may be confronting you with something this morning.

The Jewish scholasticism of Jesus Day. That rabbinic scholasticism allowed you to think of yourself as a good person by manufacturing loopholes that distorted the plain intended meaning of God's Word. Do we ever do that? Do we ever manufacture loopholes for ourselves that distort and twist the plain intended meaning of God's Word?

The rabbinic scholars would have agreed with Jesus that the law says to love one's neighbor as oneself. However, not everyone was to be regarded as one's neighbor. This is why I in prison was able to say, I'm not a racist, I'm a racialist. I love my own more than I love others. Do you see the distortion of the Word of God in that? I'm not a racist, I'm a racialist. And in that way justifying myself.

Gentiles were not to be regarded as neighbors, but as enemies. Sinners of the gentiles, Samaritans who were of mixed Jewish and Gentile ancestry, were simply to be regarded as non-neighbors, a lower form of life perhaps. So Jesus, in responding in the way that He does. He is taking direct aim at the self-centered and even racist distortion of the law that allowed the Jews to pretend obedience to God when their hearts were far from Him. Of course not every Jew did this, but certainly there were those who were greatly guilty, including the Pharisees that were so often at odds with Jesus.

What about us? What about you and me? Who do you imagine yourself to be in the parable of the Good Samaritan? This is the blessing of narrative. This is why Jesus so often uses stories, isn't it? Narrative allows you to perhaps see yourself in the story. Are you the priest who passes by on the other side, afraid to be made unclean by contact with an unbeliever? Are you the Levite, the one who comes who should show mercy but sees the wounded man and passes by without helping? Do you regard yourself as the Good Samaritan, the one who heroically and selflessly flouts the cultural norms in order to keep the law of God? That's an easy one for us to imagine ourselves as, isn't it?

What hinders us? What is it that keeps you and me from stopping our busy lives long enough to minister the love of Jesus and the life-giving medicine of the Gospel to those all around who have been treated so cruelly by the world and the world's taskmaster, the devil. I served under him for so long. I know him to be a cruel taskmaster.

What hinders us from doing the very least that God requires of us? What are the ways that you and I seek to justify ourselves, seek to excuse ourselves, seek to create loopholes for ourselves? What are the excuses that we come up with, at least in effect to say that person is not my neighbor.

Who has God placed in your life all around you? Perhaps your neighbor. Perhaps the one that drives in to the driveway and the garage door goes up and the car goes in and the door comes down. Have you ever invited that person into your home to share a meal to hear of Christ? Have you ever invited that person here to Trinity to hear the Word of God faithfully proclaimed and perhaps to see the Lord do what only the Lord can do in the heart?

Why is loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves so hard? Well, the answer is simple. It's one word, Sin. That's the answer. But then we come to the final question. What would Jesus have me to do? And this is a heart stripping question. Jesus ends the parable with a simple question designed to strip away all the layers of self-righteousness and self-justification. So which of these three, do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? What do you say, Mr. Lawyer?

And by this time we should be able to recognize ourselves in the lawyer. Because I am the one who has justified myself. I am the one who has failed and failed and failed again and again and again to show mercy and compassion to those around me, to speak of Jesus, the most merciful and compassionate thing that we can ever do, or to shine the light of Jesus by a life that is in this world, but not of this world.

The question for you and me as this passage strips us bare before the Lord is simply this. What would Jesus have me do to do? And the answer is right here in verse 37. "Go and do likewise." Go and do likewise. Is there any sacrifice that Jesus is not worth making? Is there any person that I can honestly say that He would not have me to love? Well, think of Jim Elliot. Think of Nate Saint. What if he even calls me, commands me to love my enemies? What am I to do then?

Perhaps there are those who think differently from me politically. How will I treat them? How will I speak of them? How will I speak to them? How will I speak on social media? Will I love even my enemies? Jesus is not giving us a work to do to justify ourselves. We're justified not by our works. We're justified by the works of Jesus. He's the man, capital M, who perfectly loved God, who perfectly loved His neighbor as Himself all the way to the cross. We're justified by faith alone, as we rest on Jesus for all that the law requires of us and as we seek from Him by the inward work of the Holy Spirit, the love that He requires of us, the love for God that will produce a love and compassion and mercy for others, even those who are enemies of Christ and the Church. We are reminded we cannot, we cannot lift even a finger for Christ unless He works in us, pouring out His love, shedding His love abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That is the only way.

Do you know it's not enough for us to say that Jesus died for us at the cross? How wonderful that is. Jesus died for us. He paid the penalty for us. He went to hell for us on the cross. What a wonderful thing. But Jesus also lived for us every moment of every day, both in His external actions and His inward dispositions of the heart. Jesus perfectly loved God and His neighbor for you, that you might have His perfect love, that you might have His righteousness imputed to you by faith alone. What a wonderful and precious thing when we Begin to meditate upon it seriously.

Do I fail to demonstrate that love? Do I fail to love those around me who need to hear the Gospel? The answer is yes. The answer is not do I fail? But how often do I fail? Why is it that I fail so often? Why is it that I fail in my own home? Why is it that I fail toward my wife and toward my children? Why is it that I fail to. Towards those nearest neighbors? And I'm teaching my children, I'm saying to them, you, your brothers and sisters, those are your nearest neighbors. Can't you begin to begin to begin to love them? If you can't begin here in our home, how will you ever love your enemies outside?

But I fail. I fail in my example. Could it be that the reason we fail so often is because we've forgotten the width and the breadth and the depth and the length of Christ's love for us? And we don't meditate upon that as much as we should. We don't meditate on who He is because this parable is a picture of that love. You and I, we're not the Good Samaritan, you and I, we are the priest. We are the Levite, we are the lawyer. We fail again and again and again to show the love of Christ for lost and dying sinners.

But Christ, Christ, He is the good and the great Samaritan. He came into the world though He was a foreigner to the world. He became flesh and dwelt among us even in a manger. He took notice of us and our sin and our misery. He came to His own, and His own received Him not.

They beat Him, they mocked Him. They put a crown of thorns upon Him. And even then, from the cross. What did He say, Father? Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

He stooped down in infinite mercy to carry us like sheep on His shoulders. He applied the balm of the Gospel to our wounds. And now what does He say? Simply this. Go and do likewise. Go in my name and do likewise.

Our question has been a simple one, dear brothers and sisters, but one with profound and vast implications for every single one of us, even for you children here today. Who is my neighbor?

Jim Elliot and the brave missionaries who died with him answered the question with hearts full of love and arms open wide to their enemies who were in the process of killing them. Elizabeth Elliot, grieving her husband's murder, nevertheless could not justify going back to the comfort and the safety of America. She was compelled by the love of Christ to tell the Waldani about Jesus to finish what her husband had begun. And to use the love of her husband as a picture book. To teach them the love of Jesus Christ.

And you see that love has been vastly multiplied. And there are many, many souls that have been delivered. From death to life. And from hell to everlasting life. And so let me ask you this. Trinity Church who is your neighbor? Who is your neighbor? Is it Fresno? Is it the whole city of Fresno? All the inhabitants, all the souls of Fresno, California? Isn't that big enough? A lifetime's worth of work? Many multiple lifetimes worth of work. What about the 21,000 prisoners scattered throughout this valley? Unseen neighbors? Will you love them? Will you serve them? If so, if you have a desire, please come and talk to me. Come and talk to Pastor McCracken afterwards. We would love to tell you how to do that. Is Fresno your neighbor?

If so, go then and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing and teaching them whatsoever things Jesus has taught you. Bring them to church where they'll hear the Gospel. And take hold of Christ's promise and Christ's assurance. As you do. What does He say? Lo, I am with you always. Even to the end of the age. Amen.

Let us pray. O gracious God and Father. Help us by Your grace to love our neighbors as ourselves. With that love which You have poured into our hearts. By Your grace, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.