

First Presbyterian Church
Summer Sermon Series: "Won't You Be My Neighbor?"
Rev. Catherine Oliver
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This morning we get to work with one of Jesus' best known parables that I like to refer to as the parable of the "Compassionate" Samaritan. I believe this parable is teaching us to be compassionate.

Remember, parables were one of Jesus' favorite teaching methods. They are stories that invite us to move out of our traditional world views or religious dogma.

Parables invite us to see with fresh eyes. They are like clean windows that invite us not to look **at** them, but to look **through** them. Jesus' parables offer us a view of God's world. And what does God's world look like? What does God require of us? As Susan just read, to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

Listen now to God's word for you.

Luke 10: 25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall 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." And Jesus said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to **justify himself**, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and

saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling **came near him; and when he saw him**, he was moved with pity. (As a major side note the Greek Lexicon uses the word compassion not pity when translated into English. So a Samaritan while traveling **came near him; and when he saw him**, he was moved with compassion.

And the Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

Jesus asked, "which of **these three, do you think**, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The Word of the Lord.

Around 5 p.m. this past Tuesday I went to First Light, carrying a small loaf of bread, a little bottle of grape juice and my Bible. Twice a month I get to go to First Light and meet some new neighbors. This week, I met 4 new neighbors that had never been a part of our bible study gatherings.

We typically start with introductions. Everyone says their name.

Then I introduce myself: "Hi, I'm Catherine Oliver, a pastor at FPC, the church right down the street.

One person said, "Oh, you are the church with the big red doors, by Pathways, and now with that pretty picnic table out front, where you serve water."

After introductions, I follow with this story that Shannon taught me to tell:

FPC started First Light after seeing women suffering and even dying during a very cold winter while living on the street. Our pastors and church members saw this as a call to justice and our church acted by cleaning up our basement, and opening our doors to house and care for women. We welcomed all, no matter who they were, or what they were doing in their lives, because this is what Jesus had taught us to do.

Our church took women away from physical, emotional and weather types of harm into a safe space for at least one night. But then there became too many women who needed help. So our church worked with other churches to establish a shelter for women and children which is now First Light. There has not been a time after I tell this story that every woman says, thank you, thank you so much!

With that information, a level of trust was built and I read the parable of the Compassionate Samaritan.

In this parable the lawyer asked two questions:

First he asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus probes the lawyer, "What is written in the law? How do you read?"

The lawyer answered the first question without batting an eye:

"You shall 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."

And Jesus said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live."

The lawyer was free to go. But as any good lawyer would do, he had a follow up question for Jesus. Our text said that he asked this question to **justify himself**. So he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

I'd like to believe this lawyer was honestly asking this question because he needed some clarity. He honestly needed Windex to clean his window so he could see God's world more clearly.

Our text says that the lawyer had stood up before Jesus which was an act of respect. In ancient times and still in the Middle East Rabbis and teachers sit and students stand before their teachers.

So I am giving this lawyer the benefit of the doubt, that he really and truly wanted to understand the laws of justice.

He wanted to justify himself, which in Greek also means to make oneself righteous before God.

So I'm seeing him as longing to understand, what it means to be just and kind and merciful.... just like so many lawyers that I know!

I'm not kidding, so quit rolling your eyes! I know many just and kind and merciful lawyers!

And Jesus responds to the question with a shiny clear window into God's world. A view that would shock all listening ears by telling this parable of "who is my neighbor."

A man was beaten left by the side of the road.

The first two guys, the priest and the Levite, don't do anything to help the man who's been beaten, while the Samaritan does something. But I think that before it's about *doing*, it's about *seeing*. All the priest and the Levite see, is a burden, an obligation, a problem.

And so, it turns out, they actually **do** something: they cross over to the other side of the road. Why? So they can avoid seeing this person in need.

The Samaritan, on the other hand, sees someone, sees a human being, a person in need, a *neighbor*.

This parable invites us to look through God's window. Who, exactly, is my neighbor? Who needs my compassion? Who must I notice? Who must I open my eyes to see?

The Samaritan, recognizes that when it comes to the question of who is our neighbor, there are no rules. Our neighbor is *anyone* in need. Where does such vision come from? It comes from a God's vision of a world filled with compassion.

The *Samaritan* could see with eyes of compassion what the priest and Levite did not. Having the eyes of faith to see that all people are children of God and anyone in need is our neighbor.

My time with my new neighbors at First Light was filled with discussion about who can really be my neighbor and what it feels like to be a neighbor for others.

One person said she had waited to hear test results at a clinic that day, fearful that her life on the streets would bring bad news. But a compassionate healthcare provider, a neighbor, sat with her, saying, no matter what, God is going to work with you and through you. Her results came back negative. She is starting her life over and gave thanks for the neighbor who sat with her.

Another person shared that she had been going from house to house trying to find help. But only found places of filth, drugs and even fleas. She was so grateful to have First Light as a clean place and a place where she found new neighbors.

The friend sitting beside her on the sofa made us all laugh out loud as she started moving away from her new friend acting like she didn't want to be near someone who had been sleeping with fleas.

But then she told her story. At the court house someone she had perceived as an enemy acted kindly on her behalf and spoke up for her that afternoon. She now recognizes this former enemy as a new neighbor.

Then I told the group how much I need neighbors to pray for my family as we're going through hard times with my husband's illness. We all promised to pray for each other because we are indeed neighbors.

Then the most amazing thing happened. As I said the words of institution, I broke the bread and held the cup the group formed a circle holding hands as we shared communion together. We became one body, fleas and all.

As Mr. Roger says, "We all need neighbors, I'll be yours. Won't you be mine? Won't you be... my neighbor?"

Amen