

Love Your Neighbour

Sermon July 10, 2022

Scripture reading: Colossians 1:1–14; Luke 10:25–37

Golden Verse: “*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 neighbour as yourself.’*” Luke 10:27

The Holy Bible clearly teaches that God wants peace and love, not only between Christian denominations, not only amongst nations, but more specifically between two persons, between you and I. God, commands love between neighbours and crowns those who love and serve with His blessings.

Today, we are trying to find God’s answer to the question: who is my neighbour?

Once, an intellectual, a scribe, asked Jesus this question: who is my neighbour? His main intention was to find out: whom do I have to love? And behind this question there was a hidden one as well; Whom I do I not have to love? Whom am I allowed to hate? In response, Jesus told him the story of the Good Samaritan.

The whole question arises in relation to the great commandment of love: “*Love your neighbour as yourself.*” (Mark 12:31) Jesus demonstrates the practical application of this well-known principle with the example of the Good Samaritan.

Who is my neighbour? Whom do I HAVE to love? Whom do I not have to love? Whom am I allowed to hate? We already know how to answer these questions: who is my neighbour? Whom do I HAVE to love? Everyone! We would say that a Christian must consider everyone as his neighbour, whom we have to love and serve. However, this statement may or may not be true. Theoretically, it is true that I, a person who follows Christ, must see the neighbour in everyone. But practically, this is not how it is in most cases. Because when I say so easily that everyone is my neighbour, and I love everyone, and I can serve everyone as a good Christian, this is not true. You cannot expect me to take care of everyone in this world.

To the scribe’s question “who is my neighbour?”, Jesus could have answered that everyone is. Don’t you know that? Everyone! But Jesus knew that you and I, as humans, cannot take the whole of humanity’s problems on our shoulders.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus narrowed the scope of the concept of a neighbour when He told a story of a man who was attacked by robbers, robbed, wounded, and left almost dead by the side of the road.

Do you want to know whom you have to love as a neighbour? - asks Jesus! Not everyone, but only the person who is in big trouble and needs YOUR mercy, YOUR help here and now. That person is your neighbour.

So those anonymous wanderers who were attacked by horrible robbers. You have to love and serve those who are robbed, injured physically or mentally, and are almost dead on the side of the street, who are unable to get up, get back on their feet, or struggle to a level worthy of a human being.

In fact, true neighbourly love can also see the neighbour in robbers, who attack, and have beaten up the other person. We should still love and serve those who are attacked by demonic forces and are deprived of their common sense, sense of justice, and responsibility. They are also very unfortunate victims of our society. They should experience your love and care as well, as your neighbours.

A few days ago, I was talking to a police officer, and I asked him a challenging question: How can you struggle and make all the effort to save that person's life who willingly, with violence, damaged and killed another person? His answer was: we all are humans, and we all can make a bad decision, a human mistake, and we all deserve to get a second chance.

As Christians, we cannot turn away from anybody with disgust or even hatred but, instead, we have to see in the fallen person our neighbour, who needs our love. It is not enough to feel very sorry for them, but we must love them. And our love has to be manifested in physical help and actions. We have to imagine how terrible it would be in their shoes; then, we have to have mercy on them.

Jesus narrows this circle even more. He says that even these destroyed, plundered victims are not all your neighbour, but only the ONE at the time who gets in your way. Jesus knows very well that our hearts can ache without limit for every pitiful, troubled person. We cannot help everybody all the time but some people some of the time. We have to help that particular person whom we meet at the moment.

The priest and the Levite, perhaps with a very bleeding heart, confessed that every person was his neighbour, except for the one he was passing by on the road to Jericho. But at that time, when they saw this troubled person, only that person would have been their neighbour, and no one else, but that one.

Who is my neighbour? The ONE whom God brings into my way in a particular moment.

It is not a coincidence that Jesus presents the practice of neighbourly love with a Samaritan and a Jewish character. There was a centuries-old conflict between the two peoples. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans as inferior people. And the Samaritans hated the Jews. Their fathers would have been mutually ashamed to even speak to each other. Knowing this, we understand what interpretation Jesus wants to give to neighbourly love by saying that a Samaritan took pity on a Jew. The sons of the despised and oppressed Samaritan people helped the unfortunate son of the hated and arrogant Jewish people. It would have been much more justified if the Samaritan had behaved like the priest or the Levite. He would have had more reasons to think like this when he saw the Jewish man lying in the dust: “What do I have to do with him? I'm sorry too, for whatever happened to him! He's not part of my nation. I will let **your own** brothers help you!”

But he didn't do that. Rather, he took pity on him, forgetting all the centuries-old grievances, bitterness, and injustice, and bent down to him with the greatest concern, tenderness, and helpful love manifested in actions! He, as a Samaritan, is just a stranger to the Jewish one who was left wounded.

Here, Jesus says that neighbourly love cannot be selective. This is more than friendship or brotherly love.

Christian neighbourly love is human love that transcends all racial, religious, or social barriers, or even enemies. He loves the other person, not because that person is lovable from any point of view, or because he belongs to me racially or religiously, but only for the simple fact that the other person is also human. He is a person whom God created, like me, in his own image and likeness.

God loves you and him the same way.

He values and appreciates your neighbour so much that God sacrificed Jesus Christ for you and me and our neighbours. Jesus shed His blood for you and for your neighbours as well. God loves your neighbours although they might be people of a different race, speak a different language, or be part of a different political or sexual orientation than you are.

Does God allow you and me to ignore anyone? No! Every person is dear to God. Everybody needs to be loved and helped. Whoever cannot love the stranger, the other person, with Christian neighbourly love cannot truly and constructively love Christ Jesus. The love that sets limits, demarcates and classifies does more harm than good. People, who would select, saying: “I love this person but I cannot

love the other” do not show Christian love. The disciples of Christ can see the neighbour in the enemy because even the enemy is a human being.

It is so terrible that, in this parable, the servants of God, a priest and a Levite, walk away indifferently to the misery of their suffering fellow neighbour. They had a chance to exercise mercy, but they just walked away with some horrible excuses. They either just came from the church or were on their way there. They are definitely burdened to an increased extent by the omission.

Today, a congregation is sitting here listening to Christ’s message of love for our neighbour. After a few minutes, we will step out of this Church, and we all will walk along the way. Are we going to act in the same way as the priest and the Levite? Or will we act like the merciful Samaritan? How many of us will now become Good Samaritans? The practical life will show us if it was worth coming here to church today.

Our community here in Kitchener is expecting us to show neighbourly love. They are expecting love and acceptance from us, who belong to Christ. And if they will not receive from us, who will show them the love of Christ?

Let us accept and embrace everybody with deep respect and love, as a message of Christ.

You might say that you cannot love your neighbour on command. But if you have already accepted the mercy, compassion, and healing blood of the great Good Samaritan, who was Jesus Christ, and you experienced His great, gracious love, you will love unconditionally. We have to be born again by the Holy Spirit to be able to love with unconditional love, as Christ loves us. The more you experience the mercy of Jesus towards yourself, the truer and deeper the love for your neighbour becomes in your heart.

Please, always look to Jesus first, then reach out to others, and do the same as He did for you. Amen.