

“Jesus Makes Us Loving Neighbors”

When I say the words, “Good Neighbor,” what thought first comes into your mind? I’m going to go out on a limb and say 85% of you or better thought “State Farm Insurance.” State Farm has done a masterful job with their commercials over the last few years, whether it is Aaron Rodgers and the Discount Double-check or Jake from State Farm in his Khakis and Polo, of putting and keeping this thought in our minds: “Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.” If you believe the State Farm commercials, your State Farm rep is the neighbor you want. When something goes wrong, your State Farm rep will be there to help. When there’s a risk, your State Farm rep will be there to warn. When you need help, day or night, your State Farm rep is just a phone call away. 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 define what a good neighbor is. Today, Jesus makes us LOVING neighbors. Give your attention to Luke 10:25-37.

**<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

**<sup>26</sup> “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”**

**<sup>27</sup> He answered: “‘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.’”**

**<sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”**

**<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

**<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’**

**<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”**

**<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”**

**Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”**

The story of the Good Samaritan sticks in our minds like the State Farm commercials. You don't need to be a church goer or a Bible reader to be familiar with this story as many hospitals and charities go by the name "Good Samaritan." There are even civil laws that are called "Good Samaritan" laws. There is a recognized value to being good to people and doing the right thing, even if you don't know the laws. 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 must I do to inherit eternal life?"** (Luke 10:25) the lawyer asks. That is the question of questions! For all earthly activities and questions we give much time and attention to, each of us, at some point, has to answer THAT question. Jesus, ever the master teacher, gives the student the first chance to answer the question. The lawyer answers, **"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'"** (Luke 10:27). Great answer, Jesus says. **"Do this and you will live"** (Luke 10:28). As I picture this event in my mind I envision that things got very quiet for a moment. I envision the lawyer thinking to himself, "Did I hear Jesus right? It sure sounded like he said that I need to love God and love my neighbor perfectly if I want to inherit eternal life in Heaven." The lawyer wasn't wrong to think that because that is exactly what Jesus was saying. The lawyer knew he hadn't and couldn't do that, so predictably the lawyer felt the need to justify why he hasn't and can't love God and love his neighbor perfectly.

Can you relate to where this overwhelmed man is coming from? God says it so simply – "Love God and love your neighbor perfectly and you will inherit eternal life in Heaven." That is overwhelming and that is impossible so we offer God our excuses "Yeah, but, what about ..." and then we finish that sentence with 100 different things. "Yeah God, I know I'm supposed to love you first, but what about when that's not really convenient? What about when my life is so jam packed with activities 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, and I really want to, but my life is too busy already. I just don't have the time. Besides, some of my neighbors aren't all that lovable. And what am I supposed to do when I feel like they don't love me?" The lawyer's excuse sounded like this: "Yeah, I hear you saying love my neighbor perfectly, 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 people that I am totally in the right for not loving, correct?" That's when Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. He had to. Just saying the words, "Love God and Love your neighbor perfectly and you will inherit eternal life" isn't enough to get the point home to us, so he gives a memorable illustration to make the point crystal clear. Perfect means perfect. Your neighbor is everyone, even the Samaritan. 2000 years ago Samaritans and Jews hated each other. They were enemies. Picture the Gaza Strip today and the tensions between Palestinians and Israel. That was the Samaritans and Israel 2000 years ago. If Jesus was revising the details of his story today for Americans he

would say this: our neighbor today is North Korea, China, and Russia. Our neighbor today is the person on the other side of the political aisle from us. Our neighbor today is the high maintenance and difficult to get along with family member, co-worker, classmate, acquaintance, and stranger. Our neighbor is the church member that we don't see eye to eye with and the pastor or teacher that has upset us in some way. By telling the story of the Good Samaritan Jesus is trying to silence our excuses. **“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”** (Luke 10:27). Perfectly, without fail. Don't try to redefine Jesus words to fit your lowered and achievable expectations. Don't try to rationalize your imperfection with your excuses. First and foremost, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a call to repentance. **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (Luke 10:25). Rid yourself of this idea that you could do something. Your unloving life, my unloving life, falls woefully short of God's perfect expectations. We need a good neighbor. Correction, we need a perfect neighbor. And like a perfect neighbor, Jesus is there. **“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him”** (vs. 36-37). Each of us was that person on the side of the spiritual road – beaten and bloodied by our sinfulness, dead in our sins and deserving of eternal punishment in Hell. And God decided to be our good neighbor and had mercy on us. Jesus suffered Hell to pay for every last one of our excuses, rationalizations, and unloving behaviors. You are forgiven. And through your connection to Jesus in faith you enjoy his perfection counting as your own in God's sight. Right now God considers you to have perfectly loved him and every other person and he can't wait to spend eternity with you in Heaven.

Knowing that makes us into loving neighbors! It frees us and empowers us to follow Jesus command: **“go and do likewise”** (Luke 10:37b). It allows us to set aside the wrong questions like “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And “who is my neighbor?” We replace the wrong self-centered, what's in it for me, questions with the right selfless and sacrificial questions like “now that I know I'm going to spend eternity in Heaven because of my perfect neighbor, Jesus, what can I do to say thank you to God for his gift of eternal salvation?” And “am I being a good neighbor to other people?” And “in what ways can I be a good neighbor to other people.” Each and every day, in the normal daily routine of your life, God presents you with big and small opportunities to love and thank him for his awesome blessings to you by serving other people. **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth”** (1 John 3:16-18). As you **“go and do likewise”** find the joy, satisfaction, and purpose that God wants you to experience from a God lived life that strives to be a good, loving, and serving neighbor to others. Amen.