

Won't You Be My Neighbor? (10July22) Luke 10:25-37; Colossians 1:1-14

It goes practically without saying that the lawyer who wanted to test Jesus was a man. Not to mention this precedes a difficult story in verses we'll hear next week about Martha's diligent housework and women's roles.

If not gendered categories, you could still admit that this lawyer has little self-doubt, just fine on self-confidence, feeling pretty good about how he's doing. Keeping all the commandments? Piece of cake. When Jesus tells him to love his neighbors, he just wants to know how many.

We don't get his reaction at the end of the story. It was a parable designed to shut down an insider's self-satisfaction. Part of Jesus' point seems to be, "You think you're so great at following God's commandments, the consummate faithful man, fit to inherit eternal life? Well, the hated outsider corrupt Samaritan does it at least as well."

Who knows, though. The lawyer might still have reacted, "No problem, Jesus, I'm a good neighbor and already helped six beaten up half-dead guys this week, and from a seventh I chased the bandits away."

Personally, I don't have that kind of self-confidence. On a good week, this from Jesus feels like an incredible challenge. Loving God with all my heart, all my soul, all my strength, all my mind? Huge fail already.

Loving my neighbor as myself? Hoo boy. Even though I haven't exactly come across any beaten up half-dead guys this week. Plus, I get to live in a neighborhood that is pretty bandit-free, with safer streets from wherever that Samaritan was and my neighbors mostly take care of themselves. But that doesn't make me feel like I'm responding to Jesus' command to "Go and do likewise."

Maybe partly it's that our world has changed so that I don't actually have to be walking the same mean streets and rough roads in order to stop and help. But I don't know how much I manage to stop and help anyway.

I've seen pictures of injuries in roads of Ukraine, and I sent a donation, but should I pat myself on the back for that, job well done? People

were hurt and outright killed on the main street of Highland Park, Illinois last week, but I've not involved myself that much in trying to end gun violence, besides petitions and an occasional protest. There are people with other wounds and dangerous vulnerabilities along many, many other streets, near and far, and I feel I essentially have passed by without bothering to notice, much less to assist.

Jesus commands to be a neighbor.

That lawyer who met Jesus: I hope he'd be a little less self-satisfied and would try harder, not just feeling good about himself.

I probably need some motivation, too.

But I also am not sure I'm quite like the priest or the Levite, passing by without a care.

Our situation may be more that cares overwhelms us.

Even far away, Ukraine somehow hits close to home. The Illinois shooter having been in Madison maybe more so. The threats to women's bodies, not from illegal guns but painfully legal processes. The life-sucking grind of this stupid pandemic. The scare of what comes next in politics. And climate change, where we seem to have done horribly, tragically, fearfully awful at accomplishing anything right so far, anything to love our neighbors, much less neighbors as children yet to be born, of ours or other species.

Even though I want to "go, and do likewise," and I do something, I'm still left overwhelmed. It can seem like all my neighbors are bleeding and hurting along all the roads of life.

I absolutely celebrate that there's good stuff, especially in summer.

And your weeks may not have been quite like mine. Or maybe they were. Because besides all those bigger problems—yet also compounded by them—is the personal small stuff. Even that can just be too much. Not enough hours in the day to do what needs to be done, really needs to be done, much less the daily details of keeping a house in order and eating a real meal and getting some sleep and doing decent in relationships.

It turned out that our weekly email prayers seemed weighted to my needs. My mom having some scary medical tests. Acacia's uncle dying

suddenly of heart troubles and her travels to Montana for the funeral. A family member with gender-transition surgery. I told Pastor Jen: it's a lot.

Sometimes I don't just want to be a neighbor who loves others. Sometimes I need a neighbor who loves me. When I know I'm not the greatest at offering care, or the kindest in email dialogues, or even remembering what task is next.

I'll clarify that this is not begging; it's actually some apology, plus my sympathy for your own situations. I don't want you to feel bad you're not doing enough for me. That's the reverse of the point. Jesus was smart not to use himself as the example in a parable.

I'm just saying sometimes it's hard to have great capacity to be a neighbor, when we need a neighbor.

I hope we can be that to each other. For me, I'm grateful I got to reach out to a couple people on hospice care this week. I'm grateful I got to talk to Alliant Energy about keeping one person's power on and offer prayers and ideas and consolation for another person facing shut-off. I'm grateful I got to be present and pray before surgery. I'm grateful I got to hang out with Kids in the Garden. Heck, I'm grateful I used Facebook. I'm grateful I got to grind at some of the details, to hold tightly literally to people I love, and figuratively to bigger situations. That's something.

We may simultaneously be and need a neighbor.

Which brings me also to the larger need. Jesus leaves himself out of the parable of the Good Samaritan. But, at least for me, he can't be left out. I need him. I need and appreciate all of you. But for all the care you offer each other, kind words you share, meals you bring, prayers you give, assistance you ... assist with, relationships we have and, in the bigger picture, sunlight on the lake, goodness from my CSA farmers, my dog's cuddling—still we're not just a mutual aid society, but need Jesus.

So he's the one we finally need to show up along life's roadsides. He's needed in war-torn streets, and in pretty safe ones where life still struggles here.

I like our Colossians reading, about walking together on the road of life as disciples. But even more, it reminds us that Jesus not only guides us along the road, but walks with us in love, and goes ahead of us confronting our woundedness and death itself to lead us through, as the Really Good Samaritan we really need.

I don't mean to end so briefly on that most vital note. But sometimes that's the glimmer we need, through bloodied, tired, tearful eyes, looking for a neighbor.