

Going Beyond Church Walls

SERMON NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Today, we are going to reflect on the question – Who is my neighbor?

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Where is the hope for those facing multiple challenges in places like Kenya? Where is the hope in the middle of your area of crisis and uncertainty?

This question has reverberated throughout church history since the time of Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was once asked by a religious expert this exact same question “Who is my neighbour?”

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This question, which may seem simple at first glance, carries profound significance in our daily lives as followers of Jesus. If you are anything like me, when I first reflect on this question, I immediately think of our neighbours who live next door to us or those families and individuals who live on the same street or live within the same community. People, generally speaking, who are similar to me – look like me, talk like me, have a similar life experience as me.

But this simple question has deep significance, and Jesus, in His infinite wisdom, responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan, offering us timeless teachings on compassion, love, and the true meaning of neighbourliness. This parable has the power to unlock and unleash God’s people to be radical compassionate neighbors to those who don’t just look like us. Not only in our own towns and cities, but also to neighbours in unfamiliar places across the globe.

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Tearfund Canada is immersed in thinking about those neighbours in some of the poorest places.

- Those living in extreme poverty.
- Those dealing with the ravages of climatic crises.
- Those facing the pain of war, conflict and the brutal implications of their region of the world.
- Those parents making difficult decisions about what mouths to feed each day.

So we are invited today to go beyond church walls and think in fresh ways about our neighbours!

Let's open Scripture together and read from:

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SCRIPTURE – Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

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'[a]; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'[b]"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii[c] 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.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

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THE SETTING:

In this familiar parable, Jesus tells the story of a man who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the side of the road. Somewhere between Jerusalem and Jericho. A desolate terrain with ample hiding places for robbers. It was a setting that people could imagine. A priest and a Levite, both respected figures in society, passed by without offering any help. But then a Samaritan, a member of a despised and marginalized group, came upon the wounded man. Despite their differences and societal prejudices, the Samaritan's heart was filled with compassion.

He bandaged the man's wounds, poured oil and wine on them, and then placed him on his own donkey, taking him to an inn where he could be cared for. The next day, the Samaritan even gave money to the innkeeper and promised to return, going above and beyond to ensure the man's well-being.

Those hearing this parable would have been astounded at how that scene unfolded! This was unexpected and radical to their everyday thinking!

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THE LESSON:

Now, this parable teaches us many lessons, but one of its central messages is about being a good neighbour.

[PREACHER TO INSERT Personal Story of being a recipient of hospitality/a good neighbour]

Jesus challenges us to redefine our understanding of neighbourliness. He shows us that being a good neighbour is not restricted to those who look like us, speak like us, or share our beliefs. Rather, being a good neighbour means extending kindness, love, and assistance to all, especially to those in need, regardless of their background or social status.

Is this easy? No! We don't like going beyond our personal walls, let alone our church walls. We like the known, the safe, and the things we can control. Going beyond the walls can cost us in time, money, convenience and maybe even reputation. On the other side of the wall we might encounter the injured, the sick, the destitute, the addict and the hopeless. People who are not like us in both outward appearance and inward thought.

The priest and the Levite in the story were religious figures, yet they failed to show compassion and ignored the man's suffering. Their actions remind us that religiosity alone does not make us good neighbours.

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It is our willingness to act with empathy and kindness that defines our character.

The Good Samaritan teaches us to see beyond our differences and prejudices. It reminds us that we are all interconnected, and our well-being is tied to the well-being of others. It challenges us to break down the barriers that divide us and to recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every human being.

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KENYA STORY:

So how does this relate to the work of Tearfund Canada?

We as a church have been in partnership with Tearfund for many years, working together to respond to the needs of those living in poverty.

And one of the core components of Tearfund's work is Church-Based Community Transformation (or CCT). CCT is a biblical model of development that works with local churches, helping them to go beyond their walls and address the unmet needs of the wider community – physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Essentially, CCT is answering the question – who is my neighbour?

For over 15 years, Tearfund has been partnering with Fadhili Trust in Kenya. Fadhili is a Christian organization registered in Kenya and works through partnerships to design, promote and implement innovative and sustainable projects for the holistic transformation of rural communities. Fadhili's employees are local experts who work alongside churches in communities that suffer from high levels of poverty – food insecurity, lack of access to education, and economic disempowerment, to name but a few. Yet, amidst these challenges, Tearfund & Fadhili have witnessed the incredible transformation in communities through local churches that have been trained in CCT.

Let me introduce you to one such church community in Makueni County – Good News Church, led by Pastor Grace.

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VIDEO

Share Mercy's story

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Mercy's Story:

- Left with the responsibility of her family
- Hopeless with so many people to feed
- Living in a dry rural area

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Thankfully the church responded. This story shows the power of the local church to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the community in which they are placed. They are meaningfully responding to the question – who is my neighbour? Going beyond the walls of the church.

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This parable in Luke challenges us to reflect on our own attitudes and actions towards others. It reveals that being a neighbour goes beyond mere proximity or shared beliefs; it is rooted in selfless love and acts of kindness towards those in need. The Good Samaritan's actions embody the essence of Christian values, reminding us that our neighbour is anyone who requires our help, regardless of their background, ethnicity, or social standing. It challenges our church to go beyond our walls.

In a world that often emphasizes divisions and self-interest, the parable of the Good Samaritan serves as a powerful reminder of our responsibility to demonstrate Christ's love in our interactions with others. It teaches us to be vigilant, always alert to the needs of those around us, and to respond with a compassionate heart.

May this parable inspire us to break down the barriers that separate us from our neighbours and embrace the call to love unconditionally. Let us strive to be Good Samaritans in our communities, extending a helping hand and demonstrating the transformative power of Christ's love through our actions. Living out those words from 1 John 3:18, "*Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*" By doing so, we bear witness to the Kingdom of God and become instruments of His mercy and grace.

CALL TO ACTION:

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One of the ways we can go beyond our personal walls today is to become an Outpour Partner with Tearfund Canada. Outpour Partners are a devoted group of monthly donors who are passionate about helping end the cycle of poverty in places like Kenya. This opportunity might stretch you, but you can know that you join hundreds of other people to pour God's love into our beautiful neighbours in the Global South. Seeing dignity, wholeness and the end of extreme poverty through the love of Christ.

ALTERNATE CALL TO ACTION:

1. Invite people to prayerfully consider a gift to Tearfund Canada and receive an offering
2. Direct people to the Tearfund Canada Website at www.tearfund.ca to learn more and consider a gift

tearfund.ca

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