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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
September 2, 2012

Luke 10:25-37  
"Love Your Neighbor"

The scripture lesson from Luke will be read in my sermon.

I was chatting with a friend recently who told me it was difficult for her to love her next door neighbor. Some of us are unfortunate to have neighbors who make it hard for us to be friendly with them. Suellen and I had one such neighbor for about three years. We lived in a house then and whenever we made a sound above his comfortable level he would bellow from his yard.

The gospel text today addresses the issue of neighbor. It begins with a lawyer asking Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what is written in the law. The lawyer says, "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 your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus says: "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." The lawyer wanting to justify himself, asks, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replies with the story of the "Good Samaritan."

"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.

"He 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 asks the lawyer: 'Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' The lawyer says, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus says to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

Today, when we read, "Love your neighbor as yourself," we tend to say that cannot love others when we don't love ourselves. Self concept, self-esteem, and love of self are prerequisites in our love of others.

Biblical scholars generally agree that this is not what's meant by the phrase in biblical times. The words first appear in the Torah: Leviticus 19:18. It is said that neither Leviticus 19:18 nor its New Testament developments show any consciousness of the modern psychological discovery of low self-esteem and the need to love oneself before one can love another.

Instead, we love others as God loves us and God loves us unconditionally. We appropriate God's love and love others with this love.

We look to Jesus who is the human expression of God's love in the world and we follow his way of love as shown in the Gospels. We appropriate his words and actions and live likewise.

We tell stories about love and love of neighbor. This is what Jesus did in today's biblical lesson.

A modern equivalent is Salee Allawe's story. Salee is a 10-year-old Iraqi girl, from Fallujah, Iraq, who was playing hop-scotch with her 13-year-old brother and best friend when a US missile hit her backyard killing her brother and friend and wounding Salee. She lost her legs. She was brought to the US by Paul Miller, founder of "No More Victims," who looks for people of conscience in the US to provide direct, independent action, to help victims of war.

A woman in South Carolina wanted to help. Miller connected her with Salee and she brought Salee and her father, Hassien Allawe Feras, to Greenville, South Carolina. A medical team at the Shriners Hospital in Greenville offered their services *pro bono* and a community of concerned citizens pitched in with board and lodging. Four months later Salee, with two prosthetic legs, was all smiles. Her father, Hassien, praised the medical staff, the Greenville community, and mostly Paul Miller.

Type "No More Victims" in your browser for pictures of Salee and for other amazing, heart-felt stories.

It must have been difficult for Hassien and Salee to love their US American neighbors who occupied their country but they did. They loved because they were loved by people in this southern city who loved them as much as they were loved by God.

Finally, how do we love our difficult next door neighbor? How do we love the neighbor who makes it hard for us to love her or him? It's difficult to answer this question except to say that God loves *us*, God always has, even when we are our meanest. God's love transforms us. It makes me a better person.

Some people, it seems, are never transformed by God's love but that never stops God from loving them. Imagine how hurtful it is for God when God's own reject God. It's same for us when others reject us. But we love the best we can which means seeing some good in the neighbor (affirming that they too are made in the image of God), we pray for them, we reach out in some practical way, and leave the rest to God.

Our mean neighbor of three years became ill towards the end of our stay in that neighborhood and his daughter visited him from out of State. Suellen and Anna visited them and expressed concern. We moved from that house before we could experience a result of that visit but we were happy that we reached out.

To love your neighbor as yourself might simply be feeling good about yourself in spite of rejection. We feel good because God loves us. We cannot change our neighbor. In his book *Choice Theory*, psychiatrist, William Glasser, states that “the only person whose behavior we can control is our own.”

For Jesus, the second commandment “to love your neighbor as yourself” is the logical outcome of the first. When we love God with our entire heart, soul, mind, and strength, we enter God’s world, we experience God’s love, and we become God’s love to all in the world.

The cover article in the latest edition of the magazine “The Christian Century” is entitled, “The gospel in seven words.” Leading scholars were asked to proclaim the gospel in seven words or less and provide an explanatory note.

Environmentalist Bill McKibben, who will be a keynote speaker in this year’s Bioneers conference in San Rafael, said the gospel is, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” He writes that Jesus had it figured out: It only works when we’re in it together. In the end, the point of the text today is that we’re in this world with people who Jesus calls neighbor and we are exhorted to love them as God loves us – no exceptions. Amen.