

The Good Neighbor

Luke 10:25-37

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Song of Preparation – “Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior” by Fanny Crosby

1 Pass me not, O gentle Savior,
Hear my humble cry,
While on others Thou art calling,
Do not pass me by.

Refrain:

Savior, Savior,
Hear my humble cry;
While on others Thou art calling,
Do not pass me by.

2 Let me at a throne of mercy
Find a sweet relief;
Kneeling there in deep contrition,
Help my unbelief. [Refrain]

3 Trusting only in Thy merit,
Would I seek Thy face;
Heal my wounded, broken spirit,
Save me by Thy grace. [Refrain]

4 Thou the Spring of all my comfort,
More than life to me,
Whom have I on earth beside Thee?
Whom in heav’n but Thee? [Refrain]

Prayer: Speak Lord for your children, from many different neighborhoods, are listening. Amen.

Did you tune in last summer? After waiting five long years, the 2020 Summer Olympic games finally happened. I woke my sons at 7am to watch the opening ceremonies. The broadcast announcers called out each representing country as if introducing the line-ups for a basketball game, “wearing gold, black, and green, all the way from the Atlantic Ocean...here’s Jamaica!”

Representatives from each nation carried their country’s colors and sported their tailor-made attire to showcase something of their country’s fashion. “Look at all of the world’s neighbors,” I thought. All kinds of neighbors, all colors, all shapes, and abilities. Then I asked myself, “who is my neighbor?” and more importantly, “what makes a good neighbor?”

I then thought about the many churches that exist in my hometown. I wondered which congregations would consider me a neighbor and which would Jesus consider good neighbors. Some people who once participated in worship services, Christian education classes, and community service opportunities don't come close to church grounds anymore. They said the church of their experience was loving, caring, kind, and concerned, but didn't have time for all neighbors. In some cases, didn't even consider everyone a neighbor at all.

Jesus has something to say about neighbors and the gospel according to Luke is, where we find Jesus' answer to the questions about neighbors. Let's jump right into the story. A lawyer challenges Jesus about the Jewish law of Moses. Like any good lawyer, he wants to see if Jesus has considered the definitions of the terms, if Jesus has considered the scenarios to which the law could be applied; so, he asks, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers by telling a story about a traveler who is robbed. We don't know much about the robbers. We just know that there were more than one. It could have been two robbers; it could have been fifty-two robbers. We don't know the names of the robbers or their life experiences, much like we don't know the backgrounds of those who carried the flags in the opening ceremonies of the 2020 summer Olympic games.

Maybe one of the robbers was the lookout and another drove the getaway camel, but they are all called robbers by association. The text suggests that there were also other laws broken besides robbery. The victim was also stripped; the victim was also beaten and left alone for dead. We are talking about some serious offenses here. Some serious breaches of the Jewish law, so the lawyer, who specializes in the intricacies of the law poses this very serious question to Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?"

In the face of these serious offenses in our story, who will prove to be a good neighbor? Ah here comes a priest. This story is going to end well, right? A person of the cloth is the first responder, a person who wears the collar, one who went to seminary, the Rev. Dr. Pastor of the 1st Baptical Presbyepiscopal non-denominational church. Surely such a one as this will pray for and care for the traveler. Oh, never mind, the priest passes by on the other side. If I can use a track and field analogy, the priest steps out of the lane.

Okay but wait, here comes a Levite. Maybe the priest didn't see the man in the middle of the road, bare, bleeding, and faintly saying "I can't breathe." We don't have to depend solely on clergy; there are others in the faith community who can assist. Here comes The Levite. The Levite will surely help; that's the worship leader, the one who sings that "pass me not" song. Surely, they won't pass, but they too pass on by. It is interesting how we sometimes ask God, in our prayers and songs, to do things for us we are many times not willing to do for others...*(singing) while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.* And yet that is exactly what the Levite does.

Our text paints a grim picture. The persons identified with ordained ministry, organized religion, trained to help those in need, and keepers of the law walk right

on by a human that is in need. Surely, we cannot call them good neighbors and neither does Jesus. Jesus introduces us to the one he believes to be a good neighbor, a traveling Samaritan.

I'm pretty sure the Samaritan was on his way somewhere. I can imagine that when the Samaritan brushed his teeth that morning, he had other plans. I am sure the Samaritan had places to be, things to do, and people to see. Tending to the traveler disrupted those plans and yet Jesus uses this disruption to teach the lawyer, and us, a lesson about traveling this life as a good neighbor. Our disrupted plans must not take priority over others in dire need; a good neighbor recognizes this.

Who are our neighbors? As a member of a worshipping community, school, place of employment, or a certain floor in an apartment complex, it might feel as if there is no need to get to know or tend to others in our communities because we already have *our* members, *our* friends, *our* people. It would be easier just to pass on through. Who are our neighbors? The answer to the question is all around you. Think about all the places you just stop by or pass through. Who are our neighbors?

In our text, the question is asked, "Which one was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The lawyer is unaware that Jesus is now cross-examining him about the law. Any person the lawyer names—priest, Levite, Samaritan, or robber – would be the correct answer to the question. The priest, Levite, Samaritan, and robbers are all neighbors to the man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, but only one was a good neighbor. I believe Jesus is really asking the lawyer and us, "which one was a *good* neighbor?" Jesus tells the lawyer to do likewise. Jesus is telling the lawyer to be a good neighbor. Many label this parable as the Good Samaritan. A more accurate title is The Good Neighbor.

In closing, the Samaritan traveler in the text was deeply hurt by the church. I can imagine they never set foot back into a church again. I can imagine that if the traveler had children, they didn't take them anymore, and there are so many ill effects of the painful experience on that dreadful day. I want to challenge each of us to be aware of when we are crossing to the other side of a path of another human to avoid seeing and tending to their pain. Some people might cross to the other side because the person on the path is unvaccinated, part of another religion, or no religion. Some might cross to the other side because the person on the path is part of another political party, understands a different interpretation of the Bible than we do, or lives across or on the railroad tracks, yes literal railroad tracks. Be aware when and why you are crossing the street. Let this next season of your journey in faith be titled, in part, The Good Neighbor. Amen.