



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for Pentecost 13**  
August 27, 2023

## A Life Lived for Others

### Luke 10:25-37

<sup>25</sup> *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* <sup>26</sup> *He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”* <sup>27</sup> *And he answered, “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.”* <sup>28</sup> *And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”*

<sup>29</sup> *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”* <sup>30</sup> *Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.”* <sup>31</sup> *Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.* <sup>32</sup> *So likewise 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 journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.* <sup>34</sup> *He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.* <sup>35</sup> *And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’* <sup>36</sup> *Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”* <sup>37</sup> *He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”*

Ok, word association time. What’s the first thing that pops into your head when I say: “Good Neighbor?” I’m going to take a shot and say that 85% of you or more thought of State Farm Insurance. If you believe the seemingly ubiquitous commercials, your State Farm agent is the neighbor you want. When something goes wrong, Jake is there to help you. When there’s a risk, he’s there to warn you. Whenever you need him, day or night, he’s just a phone call away in his khakis and polo, standing by to help.

But, this is not a commercial; this is real life. By the end of this message, I hope your picture of a good neighbor is a little different. Instead of Jake from State Farm, I hope you’ll be seeing someone a little closer to home — you. Today, Jesus makes us good neighbors. In fact, He makes us *loving* neighbors.

He does this first by teaching us what a loving neighbor *is*. Then He shows us what a loving neighbor *does*. You’ve heard the story in today’s Gospel before: the Good Samaritan. I mean, even unbelievers, even the biblically illiterate know about this story. After all, there are Good Samaritan laws on the books – and they’re actually called that! There is a recognized value to being good to people and doing the right thing, even if you



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don't know them. But today, Jesus uses this story to teach us much more. And, as you heard in the reading, He's using the story to answer a question.

While it starts with this expert in the Old Testament "testing" Jesus, it pretty quickly puts every one of our hearts to the test, doesn't it? "What do I have to do?" the lawyer asks. We know that question, don't we? Whether it's the student trying to figure out what will get her a passing grade or the employee looking for the raise, or the spouse trying to figure out what will ease the tension — we know that question all too well. "What do I have to do?"

Jesus makes it clear that the answer to that is easy. Do the right thing. God has given us pages and pages of His law. It's pretty simple: just do it. And the lawyer realizes that. He understands what the law says. I mean, look at his answer. Even Jesus says it's a good answer. Verse 27: "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.'"

But notice what happens when Jesus agrees to that. The lawyer feels the need to justify himself. Can you relate to where he's coming from? God says it's simple: love. And we say, "Yeah, but . . ." and then you finish that sentence with 100 different things. "Yeah God, I know I'm supposed to love you, but what about when that doesn't really work for me? What about when my life is so jam-packed 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 "Yes, Lord, I know I'm supposed to love my neighbor, but what about when they're so annoying that I can't them? What about when they don't love me? What if they hate me? You don't really expect me to love people like *that*, do you?"

How did the lawyer put it? "Okay, I hear you saying that I should love my neighbor, but . . . who is my neighbor?" Do you see what he's asking? Do you see what he's trying to do with God's law? He's a lawyer! He's trying to find a 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? Surely there must be a line somewhere, right?"

That's when Jesus tells the story. He had to. Just saying the words gives us wiggle room to redefine them. You see, our sinful pride is really good at that. We have an almost infinite ability to rationalize and excuse or selfishness. We even try to do it with God's law. We make it about us: "What do I have to do? What's in it for me? What's my reward?"

And Jesus teaches that it's not about us at all. Those are the wrong questions. The answer is that it's about God (why I do it), it's about love (what I do), and it's about others (who I do it for, and it's not for me). Until I see that, I'm going to be banging my head against the wall, trying to do the right thing for all the wrong reasons and making even the right things wrong.

Let's go back to the student, employee, and spouse I brought up earlier, you know, the ones trying to figure out what they need to do. The answer for the student is not to memorize a set of data points that will get her a good grade; it's the process of studying the material, all of it. Then she grows smarter and learns to learn and the grades become



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a byproduct of that. For the employee, the answer is not chasing down a promotion by doing a few random “good deeds” that’ll catch the boss’s attention; it’s going “all in” to do a good job, to be a good employee. Then the promotions come, and the job becomes far more fulfilling. For the spouse, there’s no a checklist; it’s a way of life — sacrificing, showing kindness, love — not so that you get something out of it, but because you want to love. And you know what? That gets noticed.

The neighbor we’re to be concerned with isn’t *them* — it’s *us*. It’s not about “who is my neighbor?” It’s “am I a good neighbor?” And that isn’t limited to those I like, or those like me. It isn’t limited to those it’s convenient to be a neighbor to, or even painless. Being a loving neighbor hurts sometimes. It takes sacrifice.

The priest in the story wasn’t willing to sacrifice. There were laws. If the man died, the priest would’ve been unclean and unable to do his job. He had his excuses. And they were easily justifiable. But it doesn’t matter, does it. No one who heard the story Jesus told would’ve said that the priest did the right thing.

Or how about the Levite? He passed by too. And he had his excuse, right? He was just following his leader, the priest. Of course, you want to please those in authority over you. But, same thing — no one who heard the story Jesus told would’ve said that the Levite did the right thing.

It was the Samaritan, wasn’t it. The Jews’ natural enemy. Despised by the Jews and hated, and guess what — the feeling was mutual. Think of the Gaza Strip and the hostility that exists today between Palestine and Israel. Very similar animosity. But it was the Samaritan — the one you would least expect to be “good” to that Jew. But he didn’t stop to think about all the reasons he had not to help. He didn’t ask the question, “How does this affect me?” or “What would this guy do for me?” He just loved. He sacrificed. He went out of his way to help that man who would’ve run away from him if he could. But, what did he do? He used all his resources: bandages, oil, wine, money, time. He put the man on his donkey, and he walked. He gave the innkeeper his money and was committed to following it through. Those aren’t the kinds of things you do when you think the law is all about you. And that’s certainly not what you do when you’re prone to asking questions like, “What do I have to do?” or “How much is enough?”

The Samaritan’s kind of love only happens when Jesus makes us loving neighbors, when we realize that the law is love for God and love for others, not love for myself. How does he make us loving neighbors? Well, sure, first He teaches, like here, to make us see that our way isn’t the way. But then He shows the way.

In the story, it was the Samaritan that saw the man injured and wounded and didn’t pass by on the other side. He risked his life. He gave his resources. He loved. In real life, that teller of the story, Jesus, saw *us* injured and wounded. For all the times we’ve been selfish in our view of the law . . . for all the times we’ve made excuses instead of loving . . . for all the times we’ve tried to rationalize and explain away God’s expectations — in other words, for all the times we’ve sinned — we are as spiritually helpless as that beaten



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man on the side of the road. And Jesus saw us. From eternity He saw us, and He set aside the pleasures of heaven, gave up basking in His glory and honor — to put Himself at risk. No, more than that — He did more than risk. He came here to go without a place to lay His head, so that He could prepare a place for us; to go without food so that He could give us the bread of life; to die so that we can live. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

Jesus was love. He was the loving neighbor who acted for us. And He succeeded. He made us what we weren't. By paying our price and substituting His perfection for our failures, Jesus makes us loving neighbors. That's how He can close our text the way He does. Verse 37: “Go and do likewise.”

Go and do likewise. Be a loving neighbor. And if you're looking for some ways to do that, if you need to be challenged to get yourself out of those old habits of only loving the lovable — check out this month's challenge card. There's one with in your worship materials. There are more on the ledge in the narthex. They'll show you some great ways to be a loving neighbor — both individually and as a congregation. It all comes down to learning what Jesus is teaching today. Being a loving neighbor is not making excuses, and it's not just doing things. It's doing things out of love. May God grant you grace to see that love in Jesus and to live a God-lived life of serving others. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen