Love Like Jesus – Part 3

# Who Is My Neighbor?

# (Luke 10:29-37)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’ve been in a series entitled “Love Like Jesus”, looking at what love is and what love does. Today we’re going to talk about learning to love one another in spite of our differences, because one of the big issues in the world today is prejudice toward those who are different than us. Now, before you disengage thinking that this doesn’t apply to you just because you don’t wear white sheets, burn crosses in your yard, support white supremacist, or radical Islamic ideology, for the purpose of this message we’re going to define prejudice as:

“A preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.”

In other words, prejudice is pre… judging someone without the basis or facts to make that determination. And so, if we’re going to love like Jesus, we’ve got to start thinking about prejudice differently because the Bible is very clear,

“Whoever claims to live in him (that is in Christ) must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

In other words, as followers of Jesus we need to lead the way in loving others. We need to walk as he did, following his example of loving those who are different than us, because from the very beginning Jesus sent out his disciples to go to all the nations. After he ascended to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to empower us to break down every barrier, whether geographical, cultural, racial, economic, political, or social. The Spirit of Jesus is continuing today to work and apply his work on the cross to those who believe for the very purpose of making them into one new body. The apostle Paul reflecting on this great grace of God tells us,

Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14).

Therefore, Paul urges us to make every effort to keep what Jesus had worked to create, a people united by the Holy Spirit and held together with the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). And we can… we can keep that bond of peace, being united in the Holy Spirit, walking as Jesus did and living out God’s will. Today, his Spirit within us will empower us to be a part of the solution to prejudice in America today. We can see the barriers, the distinctions of race, culture, nationality, politics, economic status, and family that so often divide us as human beings, we can see them fall away.

You see, in his life on earth Jesus broke down barriers of prejudice in all of its various forms, because prejudice is the absence of love, and therefore prejudice is the absence of God, because God is love. And so, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, offering himself unblemished to God, cleansing our consciences from acts that lead to death, because the bottom line is that prejudice is a sin that affects us all. Prejudice hurts everyone and yet it’s found in people from all walks of life, married or single, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, employed or unemployed, black or white, and everything in between.

In fact, Jesus illustrated this once as he had an encounter with a guy in Luke chapter 10. This guy comes up to Jesus and asked him a question.

"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25).

Now, Jesus does what Jesus often did, and he answered the question with a question.

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26).

Now, this man was an expert in the law, in other words, he was a Bible scholar, he knew the Word of God, and so he quickly replied,

“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" (Luke 10:27).

Jesus said, “Exactly!” "You’ve answered correctly. Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28).

And so, this guy knows what he’s supposed to do, but in verse 29, he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus,

"And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29).

He’s very purposeful and so he asks specifically, “Who exactly is my neighbor?” In other words, “Do I have to love someone who’s of a different race, culture, nationality, politics, level of education or economic status? I know I’m supposed to love my neighbor, but who does that include, who is my neighbor?” Again, Jesus answers in his usual thought-provoking way, not specifically saying who is our neighbor, but illustrating to whom and how we are to be a neighbor. He tells a story which many people believe was a true story, a current event that people were aware of, and so he wasn’t just making up a story to illustrate his point. Jesus begins:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of 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” (Luke 10:30-32).

And so, here’s this guy who just had the daylights beat out of him, he’s likely to bleed to death if he doesn’t get some medical attention, but these two guys saw their Jewish brother and passed by on the other side of the road. Now many of us have found ourselves in that same situation and we can think up dozens of excuses for why they would have ignored this guy and even why we would have. You know, we don’t have time to be inconvenienced, we don’t want to get dirty on our way to work, or be late for dinner, or it’s just too dangerous, it could be a set up, and on and on and on we could go, one excuse after another. But then Jesus turns the tables and he says something that’s so amazing, an incredible twist, the punchline, just three important words in verse 33,

“But a Samaritan...”

Now, this is important so we need to learn a little bit of history. You see, about 700 years before Jesus was born the city of Samaria in the northern kingdom of Israel was overthrown by the Assyrians. The rulers and leading citizens of Samaria were deported, they were exiled faraway to places in Syria, Assyria, and Babylonia. The King of Assyria replaced the exiled Israelites with foreigners who then intermarried with the remaining Israelites. The result was a mixed race that believed in the God of Israel, but they also continued in their idolatry, worshiping the pagan gods of those foreign lands. In fact, the Bible says specifically,

“When they first lived there, they did not worship the Lord” (2 Kings 17:25).

And so, it was this mixed race, the offspring of these people, that became known as the Samaritans. They claimed to be the people of God, but they worshiped idols, and they didn’t worship God in Jerusalem at the site chosen by God. Therefore, they were offensive to the Jews who were zealous for racial purity, devout in their religion, and who worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem. And so, Jesus reminds them of the Samaritan, he shocks their sense of national identity, because for 700 years the Jews hated the Samaritans and the Samaritans hated right back. In verse 33, Jesus says,

“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, 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, took him to an inn and took care of him” (Luke 10:33-34).

And so, it wasn’t the Jewish brother who walked across the street and took pity on this man but the Samaritan. It was the Samaritan that showed love to those who hated him, who showed mercy to a man in need, and in so many ways that’s the heart of the gospel, God reaching out and loving us when we were still his enemies. And yet somehow, even today we find ourselves not trusting certain people, maybe because we’ve been the victim. Maybe it’s been handed down, passed down from generation to generation. Maybe it’s just ignorance, a lack of exposure, you know, they’re different and so we don’t like them.

But what I’d like to do today is for us to recognize the potential within each of us to look down upon someone, to ridicule, ignore, or alienate someone. And so, we’re going to look at who is our neighbor, but also how are we to love our neighbor. And to begin, number one, we need to ask for God’s help to examine our ways.

## 1. Examining Our Ways

You see, our sin is often difficult to see in the mirror because we often feel justified; we have a multitude of excuses for why we feel the way that we do, for taking offense against someone of a different race, culture, nationality, politics, economic status, or belief system. It could be completely unintentional, but we must call it what it is, and so we need to examine our ways, because any favoritism, prejudice, or distinctions that divide us are hurtful, destructive, and sinful. It’s for that reason that we need God’s help to recognize these things that divide us and by the power of the Holy Spirit we can be honest and sincere with ourselves so that like Jeremiah we can come humbly to God saying,

“Let us examine our ways and test them and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven and say: "We have sinned…” (Lamentations 3:40-42).

You see, this is the type of transparency that we need to have before God, because most of us were raised with some type of prejudice. Maybe it’s something that your friends, a parent, or grandparent used to say, but it’s a preconceived opinion, a judgment upon someone of a different appearance, stature, race, culture, nationality, politics, or economic status. Whatever it was, whatever distinction was made, it wasn’t based upon reason or actual experience. And so, we’ve got to recognize that in some way we all do it, because we’re all sinful people, and we’re all predisposed to make wrong judgments about people. That’s why David said with such transparency before God,

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me…” (Psalms 139:23-24).

You see, many of us were raised in households, growing up with friends and families that talked about certain kinds of people, teaching us wrong things about people. You know, a certain kind of person is greedy, churches just want your money, if it’s not the King James Bible, or those people are lazy, those people are useless. And whatever it is, you grew up thinking certain things about certain people. And so, we need God’s help to see our hearts and to have the courage to acknowledge and admit that maybe we’re prejudiced about this or that. That’s why David prayed in Psalm chapter 26,

“Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for your love is ever before me” (Psalms 26:2-3).

Because we need God’s help to examine our ways, to acknowledge that at some degree or some level we all make judgments not based upon love, but based upon someone’s race, education, appearance, or whatever. And it takes courage to admit any prejudice, confessing that before God and repenting, but that’s exactly what we need to do so that we can find healing. And so, number one we want to examine our ways. Number two, we want to renew our minds.

## 2. Renewing Our Minds

In other words, we need to begin thinking differently, because if what everybody else is doing isn’t working, then maybe it’s time to be different. If we want to be part of the solution instead of being part of the problem, we need to renew our minds. The Bible says that as followers of Christ that we need to change, the apostle Paul says,

“Don’t conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is…” (Romans 12:2).

You see, if we’re going to love our neighbor as we’ve been loved by God, we’re going to have to think about them differently. As we seek to understand others, we have to recognize that we have a very limited perspective; we don’t know the whole story, and so there are people that we encounter daily who have experienced things far different than you or I. And so, as we seek to renew our minds, understanding others in a deeper way, we need to begin thinking with the very mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).

I wonder how many of you have ever made a phone call to a store or sales representative, and after you spoke to them you physically went to that place of business looking for that person. Have any of you ever been surprised when you were finally introduced to that person, because they didn’t sound like “that” on the phone? Or others of you were on the other side, maybe you experienced challenges as a kid growing up, maybe you were the object of name-calling. You know, there was something about the way you looked, you were too tall, too short, too wide, whatever, but you were targeted, it didn’t make any sense to you, you didn’t understand, but you know how hurtful it was.

When I was in the second grade, my father began to teach me a lot about prejudice through his example. I grew up in a rural town and there were two areas on opposite sides of town that were less affluent and predominantly black. My father and I were both involved in scouts and we connected with families from both of those areas. The den leaders house where the meetings were held was on the far side of town and we would pick up a boy from the other area, on the other side of town, on our way there. And so, it was by my father encouraging me to build those relationships that we were able to break down barriers.

I remember being on the playground at school and some of the other kids wouldn’t play with my friends from that part of town. But it was my father that taught me to break down those barriers, those distinctions that divide us, and be part of the solution instead of part of the problem. And I believe that is the heart of God for this church, that we need to think differently, renewing our minds, and recognizing that we might not naturally understand because we’ve never experienced that. And so, we need to seek to understand those who might be different from us, thinking differently, thinking with the mind of Christ, and then number three, very practically loving our neighbor.

## 3. Loving Our Neighbor

You see, this is what God calls us to do. He calls us to love those who are different from us and Jesus illustrated this in the story. The Samaritan walked across the street to help another human being, even though that man would most likely not have returned the favor, and that’s how you love your neighbor, that’s how you love like Jesus. Jesus showed us how to love, not only illustrating it in this story, but he became our example. The Bible tells us that,

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Jesus is our example of loving our enemies, but it doesn’t have to be anything as dramatic as that. Loving your neighbor is simply accepting another human being as a brother or sister created in the image of God. It’s welcoming someone who Jesus Christ died for and showing them that same love. That’s what Jesus said,

“As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

You see, prejudice is not just the presence of hatred, it’s also the absence of love, and Jesus said, “By this all men will know… If you love one another.” And it’s not just those that look like us, talk like us, or think like us, but if we love our neighbor, if we love those who are different from us.

Who is our neighbor? Jesus describes our neighbor as the next person that we meet, maybe that person across the street who is hurting and in need. And so, what do we do? We do what the Samaritan did for the Jewish man. We walk across the street and love like Jesus. Just like Jesus loved us when we didn’t deserve it, we can reflect that same type of love to others, and that’s what I hope you’ll understand. Your race doesn’t matter, your culture, nationality, politics, economic status, or any other distinction that so often divides us, because there is only one race and that is the human race.

Jesus is that one place where all the barriers that divide us as human beings are supposed to fall away. His Spirit within us and his love should mean so much more to us than any other distinctions in this world. And I believe that has always been God’s heart, but he has to remind us over and over again. In fact, in the first century there was a lot of racial tension about who was a Christian and in Galatians chapter 3 the apostle Paul said,

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

He said, “You are all one in Christ Jesus.” And so, we need to embrace the fact that God loves the world, he loves everyone, and when we get to heaven, we’re all going to be there. In fact, the apostle John saw a vision of a great multitude in heaven and he described them as being from every nation, tribe, people and language, all standing before the throne and in front of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone loving God, loving their neighbor, loving one another, and so the one thing that we should do, the Bible says is to,

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another…” (Romans 13:8).

And so, it doesn’t matter where you come from, what your background is, what you believed in the past, or what you’ve done, because the Bible says there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. But the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:12-13). As followers of Jesus Christ we must recognize that the problem in the world today is the absence of love. Each one of us can be a small part of the solution because the love of God has so transformed us that the only thing we can do is love one another.

We fulfill the law by loving our neighbor as ourselves as Jesus described in verse 35,

“The next day he took out two silver coins 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 neighbor 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” (Luke 10:35-37).

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