
25th Sunday after Pentecost 2020

Ephesians 4:1-6 & Luke 10:25-37

Before Covid019 hit Canada in March of this year, we were deeply troubled by daily crime, violence, corruption, and systemic racism that made urban life nearly unlivable. According to Statistics Canada, crime rates dipped during the months of the pandemic because of social distancing. With a vaccine on the horizon, possibly in January of 2021, those fears will return. There are many reasons for these troubles, but it all comes down to one problem. We've lost the capacity to be neighbours to one another.

How concerned would you be if you heard your neighbour, whom you've never met, lost his job because of the Covid-19 pandemic? Would you blame his predicament on the virus and brush it off as his problem, not yours? What if that happened to you? Wouldn't you be devastated if you lost your job, and no one cared? Christian love is easy to obey if we consider our neighbours as those we love or admire. But Jesus imposed a more demanding definition of the neighbour. He defined the neighbour as any person, regardless of their colour or class, their politics or religion, in need.

You may know about the Good Neighbors Canada organization established in London in 2018. It does some selfless work to help people in practical ways throughout the world and within the local community. For example, as an ambassador for Good Neighbors Canada, Chad Price played two benefit concerts supporting Better Life for Girls. He has also been involved Save a School campaigns. Chad has also recently recorded a song for food relief in Guatemala during the COVID-19 pandemic. He continues to encompass everything that a good neighbour is. (Good Neighbour Canada)

Today's Gospel deals with a man approaching Jesus to inquire about the way to eternal life. The conversation focused on the two great commandments: love God with your whole heart and love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus told the man that his faithful obedience to these commandments would bring him everlasting life. But the man had another question: "Who is my neighbour?"

The Rabbis often debated that question, trying to determine what does it really mean? They wondered if it applied only to Jews. Did it pertain to specific situations only? Is a social outcast, such as a prostitute, a neighbour? They wanted to know where to draw the line. They knew Jesus kept company with people of ill repute. How would He define "neighbour"? The man who asked Jesus the question was an interpreter of the law, but his inquiry was hardly a search for truth. Luke says he "wished to justify himself." He gave the law a restricted meaning, hoping to support his viewpoint. Jesus didn't give the man what he wanted. He didn't even try to answer his question directly. He told the man about four main characters: a robbery victim, a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. Jesus ended the story with a question: "Which of these three was neighbour to the man who fell among robbers?" This question was not what concerned the lawyer. He had asked, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus turned it around and asked, "Whose neighbour are you willing to be?" This question is the essence of the story.

Why do you suppose it's so hard to put our faith into action sometimes? It's because we sometimes can't see the forest for the trees. We find one or two people that hurt us, and we assume everyone else is like that. And the second reason is that we're afraid of where doing something might lead us. i.e. Picture this: It's Sunday morning, and Max is praying quietly in Church. In his prayer, he pleads with God:

Max: God, I want to do great things!

God: You do?

Max: You bet! I want to reach millions of people about Your goodness. I want to fill that Bombers stadium with people. I like the entire world to know your saving power! I dream of the day

...

God: That's great, Max. In fact, I can use you today after Church.

Max: Super! How about some radio and TV work, or an engagement to speak to ...

God: Well, that's not exactly what I had in mind. Do you see that elderly gentleman sitting next to you?

Max: Yes.

God: Well, he needs a ride home.

Max: (quietly): What?

God: He needs a ride home. And while you're at it, one of the older ladies sitting near you is worried about getting a refrigerator moved. Why don't you drop by this afternoon and ...?

Max: (pleading): But, God, what about the world?

God: (smiling): Think about it.

The great commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself" is a personal matter. To most of us, the meaning is clear. The word "love" means active goodwill. The word "neighbour" means anybody and everybody. The commandment means that every person is to treat every other person with genuine friendliness. This law is the law of God as recorded in scripture and sanctioned by Christ. This law of love, given to regulate all human relationships, is clear. But the person looking for a way around it will find one. The priest and the Levite did. So, whose neighbour are you? The answer is in our actions.

The story of the Good Samaritan weighs on our conscience like an unpaid debt. We have known since childhood that Christians are obligated to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. But we have convinced ourselves that our neighbours are simply people just like us. We need to become neighbours in the "Samaritan" sense? When will we come to the rescue of all those who are in need?

Amen!