

Welcome To The Neighborhood

By Kate Satterstrom

July 13, 2025

First Presbyterian Church

McMinnville, Oregon

Luke 10:25-37 NRSV

An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 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." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, 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 upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. 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.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Prior to moving to Oregon, I lived in Virginia, in a suburb of Washington, D.C. I served at a church in McLean, Virginia, which was situated just a few miles from CIA headquarters, the Pentagon, the White House, and other government institutions. I arrived not knowing much about politics or the practical workings of government, but I quickly discovered that the stories on the news were actually stories about what was happening in my community and in the lives of my congregation members. It was a fascinating time, and I learned so much!

There are many stories I could tell you, but today I want to focus on just one person: David. David was a wealthy, middle-aged man who spent years working in politics, primarily in defense, national security, and foreign intelligence. Including time as a close advisor to presidents and elected officials. David became my go-to person when I had questions about what I was hearing on the news. He would sit in my office for what turned into periodic lessons in government. These times typically began with me asking what I believed to be a well-thought-through question. He would answer it but then say, "Here's what you should really be asking me about." I quickly learned that often, the thing getting all the

attention was really a distraction from something else that was going on—or only part of a larger story.

Our scripture today is one we are all very familiar with: the story of the Good Samaritan. This story is so well known that it has worked its way into our cultural vernacular. We have Good Samaritan laws, which protect individuals who provide aid to someone in distress during an emergency. There are charitable organizations, hospitals, and initiatives like Samaritan's Purse that embody the spirit of the Good Samaritan by providing assistance to those in need—particularly marginalized and vulnerable populations. Countless pieces of literature, art, and music have been inspired by the Good Samaritan. For example, Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* becomes a Good Samaritan figure himself, aiding others throughout the story. It has even inspired psychological research—most notably, “The Good Samaritan Experiment,” which studied the factors that influence helping behavior, particularly the impact of situational pressures like time constraints.

The Good Samaritan story has come to imply a sense of morality—particularly in dealing with those experiencing hardship and those on the fringes of society. But if we approach this story simply as a lesson in morality—like my friend David would point out—you're asking the wrong question. You're looking at it the wrong way. What seems simple at first glance is only distracting you from something much larger.

In Kidventure, when we talk about Jesus, we often reference his “Upside Down Kingdom.” What we mean by this is that Jesus would take something that was a religious and cultural norm and flip it on its head—healing on the Sabbath, relationships between men and women, sharing a meal with outcasts, friendships with sinners. Over and over again, he redefines institutional norms. And while these changes were welcome updates to some—often those on the fringe of society—they were much more distressing to others, often those with power and authority.

As our story begins, we find Jesus traveling to Jerusalem with his disciples. He gains a following of others who accompany them for various portions of their journey. We know that in Jerusalem, Jesus will experience his final days; he is heading to his death. In the midst of traveling, teaching, and working out logistics of where he will stay, a lawyer approaches Jesus. What is translated as “lawyer” for us could also be translated as “scribe.” However you translate his title, he is a learned person, well acquainted with the intricacies of the law. He asks Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

This question seems like a straightforward remark. Some scholars give him the benefit of the doubt—that he's asking with genuine sincerity. But others infer ulterior motives. There is growing distrust between Jesus and the keepers of the law. This man would have known the acceptable answer. You can make up your own mind as to his motivation.

Jesus turns the question back on him, knowing that as a lawyer—or scribe—he would know the answer saying, “And what does the law say?” The man easily replies, quoting the Torah

(Deuteronomy 6:5): “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 love your neighbor as yourself.” “Correct!” Jesus affirms. “Do that,” he instructs. It reads like Jesus is pacifying the man; he is ready to move on and be done with the exchange. But the lawyer follows up, asking, “Okay, so who is my neighbor?”

I imagine Jesus pausing, giving the lawyer a once-over, raising his eyebrows and cocking his head slightly, as if to say, “Are you sure you want to go there?” Then, with a deep breath, he begins the now-famous parable about a man walking the road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

This stretch of road was notorious for being unsafe. It spans twenty miles from the city on the hill to the town bordering the Dead Sea. It is wilderness, and travelers knew their safety was not guaranteed. A man traveling this road is jumped by a brood of robbers. He is stripped of his possessions, beaten, and left for dead in a ditch. A priest walks by, and then a Levite. Both are religious officials. Both are Jews—just like the man in need of help. Both pass by on the other side of the road, ignoring the dying man.

There are reasons why they may have passed him by—we want to give them the benefit of the doubt. Being religious men with important temple duties, there were strict laws about cleanliness they had to maintain. The man they stumbled upon was anything but clean. Perhaps they thought he was already dead. Perhaps it was a trap, and others were waiting to ambush them. Jesus doesn’t give us a reason. But on paper, this man was one of their own. Yet they didn’t stop.

In contrast to these respected, revered, important men who did not stop, Jesus introduces a third traveler. Plot twist: this man is a Samaritan.

Now we have to pause. Today, “Samaritan” has a positive connotation. To be deemed a “Samaritan” is a compliment. But to Jesus’ audience—especially the lawyer—it was anything but. Jews and Samaritans loathed each other. They shared religious roots but had developed radically different practices. Each viewed the other as corrupt. A Samaritan was like a wolf in sheep’s clothing: similar on the outside, but not to be trusted. In fact, just one chapter earlier, Jesus and his disciples are looking for a place to stay in Samaria. No one offers them shelter. James and John ask Jesus, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” Jesus declines, but you can sense their glee in the possibility of the decimation of Samaria.

This brings us back to the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The Samaritan notices the man who has been robbed, who has been beaten, who has been left for dead, who has been passed by, who has been overlooked and ignored. The Samaritan sees him. The Samaritan sees his humanity. He cares for his wounds; taking his time to clean them and bind them up. He then helps the man on to his own animal, choosing the harder way in order to give the unwell man the easiest way of travel. The Samaritan brings him to a safe

place to recover. He pays for his stay while he's convalescing, and he promises to cover any further expenses he may have.

To this man he's supposed to despise, the Samaritan shows an abundance of love.

Jesus looks to the lawyer, making sure he is paying attention and says, "which one of these three men was a neighbor to the man who was robbed and left for dead by the thieves?" The lawyer responds, "the one who showed him mercy". Jesus nods and says, "Go and do likewise".

In Jesus' upside-down kingdom, our neighbor is not just the person near us. Our neighbor is not just the people who look like us or think like us or worship like us or have the same resources we do. Yes, all of those people are our neighbors, and we should love them well. But... BUT... we are also called to love everyone—even our enemies—with that same mercy and compassion. There should be no difference in how we love.

This brings me back to my friend David. At first glance, the story of the Good Samaritan looks like a morality tale—we pat ourselves on the back when we do something nice. But David would remind us: look deeper. There's far more to this story of love. This is a call to love even those we dislike or distrust. This is a messy love that takes action. It is a love that takes binding up brokenness. It is a love that takes providing resources. It is a love that takes our time. It is a love that takes following up. It is a love that will make us uncomfortable.

When the Jewish man found himself abandoned on the side of the road and a Samaritan stopped, he didn't say, "No thanks, I'll wait for someone else." The love shown by his enemy was more than anyone else offered. When we are holding on by a thread, we welcome love in whatever form it takes. So too, we must throw out our reluctance when it comes to loving well.

Sitting in my office in Virginia, David taught me to look beyond the headlines. Why? Because headlines are spun to reflect agendas. All politicians do it—those with sincere intent and those with malicious intent. But we must look beyond the surface. There will always be people telling us who to love and who to hate. But in Jesus' upside down kingdom, we are called to love big. To err on the side of loving too much. Because the kingdom of God is where we love *all* of our neighbors.

There are many ways we say "love your neighbor."

When we say "Black Lives Matter", we're saying: love your neighbor—including those from marginalized communities who have historically been excluded.

When we say "Love is love," we're saying: love your neighbor—including LGBTQ+ neighbors who've long been rejected.

When we wave Ukrainian flags, or Palestinian flags or Israeli flags, we're saying: love your neighbor—including those caught in war, who've often been overlooked.

When we show outrage over ICE raids, we're saying: love your neighbor—including immigrants, regardless of documentation status.

When we advocate for Medicare coverage, school resources, WIC benefits, or prescription drug prices, we're saying: love your neighbor—including those whose basic needs are often ignored.

It's easy to love people who look and act like us. It's easy to put qualifications on our love. It's way too easy to hate. But Jesus calls us to something harder, deeper, and better.

We are called to love BIG.

Love boldly.

Love ALL of our neighbors.