

No theme...just random thoughts for 10 weeks!

Week 10 – Compassion for Neighbors

...a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' " And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10:25-29

When one of us does something good for another, we are likely to hear "you are such a caring person." Listeners in Christian churches have heard sermons, discussed the Luke 10:25-36 scripture in Church School, or reenacted the story of the Good Samaritan in a drama troupe.

The story is all about an unlikely individual going out of his way to do something good for an injured Jewish person. An action unacceptable to the residents in his village in Samaria. We are all aware that the Samaritans were absolute enemies of the Jews. Imagine what the barrister thought after asking, "*And who is my neighbor?*" He might have quaked in his sandals when Jesus told the story about a Samaritan who demonstrated love far greater than Jewish religious leaders.

Who are the perceived enemies of the USA in our lifetime. If you have lived as long as me, you would name Nazi, Communist, Al-Qaeda, and the list goes on as enemies. Russians were touted as the ultimate enemy in Pampa Texas in 1967 when I graduated High School. But a new image was introduced to me by our son Brent. He graduated from High School in 1988, three years before the Iron Curtain fell. His graduation gift request was for an "open return" airline ticket to Seoul Korea. The graduation present instructions were "go, enjoy, and return" to us as he determined appropriate.

Brent's cousins invited him to come to Seoul for a "short visit." Eight months later...he returned home. But during his stay, he earned money teaching kids in the school his cousins were employed. With the earnings, he extended the Seoul trip to Singapore, Taman Nagara rain forest Malaysia, China, and traveled the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Beijing, through Mongolia, and ultimately to Moscow.

After six days out of communication traveling across Russia to visit another cousin in Moscow, Brent called home. We answered and after our giddiness subsided, he asked "*What is it about these wonderful Russian people that we are supposed to be afraid of.*" It was obvious the people loved Brent, and he was enamored by them as well.

Sandy and I remember all of the infrequent (by lack of current technology) phone calls we received from him. The conversation above is one of the most meaningful and memorable talks during his travels. I admit, I was worried when I heard he was going to be out of communication on a train traveling through what I was negatively conditioned

to believe about his “wonderful Russian people.” Until his words, my prejudice toward the enemy was far less than neighborly, and naming all Russians “wonderful” was outside my scope of tolerance. Through the grace of God, I happily adapted to love for all.

With years in ministry surrounded by Jesus like Christian people, it is difficult for me to lump people of different colors, genders, sexual preferences (LGBTQ), ethnicities, political or religious views into a category defined as bad people. The ministry of Jesus was about caring, loving, feeding, healing, and even dining with people despised by his own race and religion.

Allow me to illustrate using a story about a man named Zacchaeus. Remember him? He was the hated tax collector, the laughed at short guy, and one targeted by Jewish bullies. From the tree he climbed to observe a Jerusalem parade, he unexpectedly heard Jesus say, *“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”* (Luke 19:5 NIV)

Jesus was looking up to the perceived “bad guy” and I can only marginally imagine the reaction by Zacch’s bullies as they walked in the procession pretending to be best friends of Jesus. “Did those words really come out of His mouth?” they likely asked. So typical of Jesus the Christ who also told the story in Luke about the Good Samaritan.

In Jesus’ story, a Jewish man was robbed, beaten, and left half-dead by the road. He reports that three men approached the scene. Two, a Priest and a Levite, shied away from the injured man by passing on the opposite side of the road. No help there. According to the Scripture, there were justifiable reasons to just walk on by. They were not necessarily bad people, but for “religious” reasons they continued and missed an opportunity to love an ordinary human being.

The third to approach was a despised Samaritan who proved to be the good man. He bandaged the wounds, payed for care and housing and went to extreme ends to show compassion to an enemy of his culture. Jesus simply questions the lawyer trying to justify himself: “Which of these three was neighbor to the wounded man?” (Luke 10:36).

Jesus’ definition for “love of neighbor” is the real practice of showing compassion and care for all people...no matter their differences or any perceived reasons to avoid them.

Peace always,
Ted