

# Neighbors & Enemies

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I don't know if it was easier to distinguish between a neighbor and an enemy during Bible times when there were clear distinctions between them.

Life was tribal and clannish. The lines were clear between Jews and gentiles, ethnic Samaritans and devoted Jews, the Law-keepers and lawless ones. Each tribe had its neighbors and its enemies clearly defined. The lines that divided people were exposed and adhered to.

How could one tell between a friend or an enemy? By one's distinct attire, accent, and mannerism. To this day looks, names, accents and attire can give us away.

We see those cultural biases in the story we know as the Good Samaritan at the end of which Jesus asks, "Which of the three was a neighbor to the robbed man?" The lawyer knows the answer, "The one who shows him mercy and compassion." Jesus says, "Go and do likewise."

I have been pondering this dialogue because we still live in a world where neighbors and enemies are clearly defined and divided. This reality fills me with heartache and dread.

The word *enemy* traces its roots to the Latin *inimicus*, *in* meaning *not* and *amicus* meaning *friend*, *amicus* also relates to *amore, love*. So enemies are those who literally are *not friends*.

I find this definition fascinating. It tells me that the norm, the way and state of being, is that all are neighbors and friends, so the others' distinction is by negation of the norm – *not a friend*.

The lawyer did not understand this. His life was about

learning and following the law according to which he could neglect a dying man on the road and go his way, and still believe he followed the law, hence did right.

Loving one's enemies is very basic to our faith, to the whole idea that God is Love. Yet, *Love your neighbor* does not go far enough, for even our instincts tell us to love those who love us. Anyone can do that. It is the status quo. But loving our enemy is quite impossible. Jesus never calls us to what's easy....

As a people of faith, as those who endeavor to walk in the path of Jesus, we are called to love especially our enemy, for that is the only way to healing and to erasing the lines. For, generally, it does not matter whether the other is friend or foe. Our calling is to be compassionate to *not our friends* eventually turning them into *friends*, wiping out all distinctions, erasing all lines, creating one humanity where ALL are neighbors.

There were two kingdoms that shared a common border. One country worshiped the sun, the other the moon. Because of their differences they went to war. Each army sent a champion to fight in single combat who fought harshly, all day, all night, then collapsed. After expressing their hatred for one another they began to chat about their loved ones, their childhoods, and life experiences. Then they fell asleep side by side.

In the morning when the sun woke them they looked into each other's eyes, embraced, and leaving their swords behind walked back to their armies. They could not fight each other anymore. By sharing their stories, hearing one another's heartaches and joys, feeling compassion for one another, they had erased the lines of animosity and become friends. One cannot call another an enemy, *not a friend*, when one learns another's story and shares their humanity.