

Before Asking “Who Is My Neighbor?”

Luke 10: 25-37; Genesis 1: 26-37

One of the most familiar questions in Scripture may also be one of the most misunderstood. A lawyer approached Jesus with a question that has echoed through the centuries: “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10: 29)

At first glance, it seems like a sincere question. But Luke tells us the lawyer asked it because he wanted to justify himself. He was searching for a boundary. He wanted to know where responsibility ended. Surely there had to be a limit to love.

Jesus refused to give him one. Instead, Jesus told the story of a wounded man left for dead on the roadside. Religious leaders walked by. A Samaritan: someone despised by many in Jesus’ day: stopped, cared, sacrificed, and restored. Then Jesus turned the lawyer’s question upside down. He did not answer, “Who is my neighbor?” He asked, “Which of these became a neighbor?”

The question was no longer about identifying worthy recipients of compassion. It became a question about the kind of person we choose to become. But perhaps there is another biblical lens through which we should read this story.

Long before there was road from Jerusalem to Jericho, long before there were Samaritans and Jews, friends and strangers, allies and enemies, Scripture declared a foundational truth: **“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.’”** (Genesis 1: 26)

Every human being carries the imprint of the Creator. Every face reflects something of God’s artistry. Every life possesses God-given dignity. If every person bears the image of God, perhaps we should redefine what we mean by “neighbor.” A neighbor is not merely the stranger who happens to need our assistance. A neighbor is anyone who bears the image of God. That changes everything. It means our neighbor is not defined by geography but by theology.

Our neighbor is not determined by race, nationality, political affiliation, religion, social class, immigration status, or economic success.

Our neighbor is every person whose life bears the fingerprints of the Creator. The elderly widow. The refugee seeking safety. The child who learns differently. The coworker who disagrees with us. The homeless man on the corner. The person serving our meal. The one who voted differently. The one whose language, culture, or appearance differs from our own. Even the person who has wounded us. Every one of them bears the image of God.

When we recognize this truth, kindness is no longer an occasional act of generosity. It becomes an act of reverence. Hospitality becomes worship. Justice becomes respect for God’s image. Mercy becomes recognition of God’s presence in another human life. Perhaps this is why Jesus could command us to love our enemies. He was not asking us

to approve of every action or overlook every wrong. He was calling us to see beyond brokenness to the divine image that sin has scarred but never erased.

The world constantly asks, "Who belongs?" The gospel answers, "Everyone created in God's image." The world divides people into categories. God begins with creation. The world measures people by usefulness. God measures them by dignity. Maybe the question the Church should ask today is no longer, "Who is my neighbor?"

Maybe the better question is: Can I recognize God's image in every person I meet? Because the moment I do, I no longer have to decide whether someone deserves my love. The image of God has already answered the question. When we see God's image in another person, we discover that neighbor-love is not merely a moral obligation. It is an act of worship offered to the God whose image they bear.

Reflection Questions:

Whose God-given dignity have I failed to recognize?

Are there people I have excluded from my definition of "neighbor"?

How would my relationships change if I began every encounter by remembering that the person before me bears the image of God?

What would happen if the Church became known not for deciding who belongs, but for honoring God's image wherever it is found?

May we become people who do not merely ask, "Who is my neighbor?" but who faithfully recognize the image of God in every person and joyfully become neighbors to them all.