Sermon 08-18-19

Seeing and Being Seen

Matthew 28:16-20

**SERMON STARTER**

We’ve been on this journey for the past few weeks, where we’ve been looking at Jesus’ command to love our neighbors as ourselves. We’ve talked about the importance of going next door, getting to know our neighbors by meeting them where they are and seeking to bless them. This is something Jesus commands us to do, not once but twice, which implies that out of all people, Christians should be the best possible neighbors. Not only is this the pathway toward eternal life, but this is how we become the people God intended us to be, by loving our neighbors.

Are you loving them? Two weeks ago we talked about how well we knew our neighbors – or how little we did know about them. **GRAPHIC: 1. Do you know their names? Graphic: 2. Do you know something about them that you couldn’t pick up by simply looking at their house? GRAPHIC: 3. Do you know anything deeper about them?**

Last week we were challenged **GRAPHIC: to get to know those who live around us**. If you live on a regular residential street, not a cul-de-sac or at the end of a road, try to get to know the families that live around you or next to you in an apartment complex. How are you doing on getting to know those who live closest to you?

When we seek to love our neighbors, we have power to do things we can’t even think to ask for or imagine. When we seek to love our neighbors, we shine with the light of Christ and by the grace of God we have the power to transform the world. In some instances, we can actually save a life, but we must take the time to go and do.

I couldn’t help but think that this is exactly what Jesus meant when he pushed his disciples saying, **GRAPHICS: “the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works.”** Jesus reminds his disciples that if you love one another the way I have first loved you, you’ll have the power to save lives.

So, meet your neighbors, be open to them, stop for them. Love. Serve. And bless them and I promise you will live and so will they.

But let me ask you this. How are you seeking out others to help you? How likely are you to ask a neighbor to give you a hand at something? One time I was asked to speak at a church in another city on a Saturday. Our normal dog sitter was out of town so I went next door to ask my neighbor if she would care for the pups Saturday afternoon. She readily said yes.

Being a good neighbor requires reciprocity. It cannot take place on a one-way street. Instead, it requires that we not only carry a desire to give, bless and love, but that we must also have a willingness to ask for help, to receive. Unless someone is willing to ask for help, or is willing to be the interruption for another, there wouldn’t be any reason or opportunity to give. We cannot give unto others without first having a willingness to receive and this is perhaps the toughest thing to do, asking for help, and yet it is essential when seeking to become a good neighbor. It’s also essential to our faith.

In her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection,* Brene Brown writes, **GRAPHICS: "Until we can receive with an open heart, we’re never really giving with an open heart. When we attach judgment to receiving help, we knowingly or unknowingly attach judgment to giving help.” ― Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection***

There is power in receiving, and often times that power is felt in the relationships formed through generosity and sharing.

This is why the greatest neighborhoods are the ones who haven’t lost the importance of the art of sharing. The greatest neighborhoods are the ones that share with one another: ingredients, lawn equipment, babysitters, even kitchens in order that everyone might live fully. It used to be that whenever you had a need, you’d generally be able to find what you were looking for simply by knocking on your next-door neighbor’s door. This is actually how the earliest Christian communities harnessed life, they modeled extravagant generosity. They understood the role of giving and receiving.

In the second chapter of Acts we read that...**GRAPHIC: 44All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47)**

There was power in sharing, in the giving and receiving of gifts. The neighborly way of the earliest Christian communities paved the way for the Lord to add to their numbers daily. This is the power of neighboring, it allows us to build, grow and expand daily, and this is great for communities, but this also has implications for the church as well…

Dr. Christine Pohl, Professor of Church and Society at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY, says, **GRAPHIC: The front door of the home is the side door of the church*. - Christine Pohl***

What this suggests is that how we live, will ultimately lead people to faith in Christ; it will lead people to the church. Our ability to love our neighbors, our front doors (or first impressions of who we are) should cause communities to grow not only in number, but also in faith, it should point back to the love of God, the living body of Christ, or the church.

What do our front doors say about us? About our hearts? About our faith? About our church?

Are our doors open? Or are they closed? Are we available for our neighbors or are we always busy? What do our neighbors say about us?

**The lives we lead are often times the only scripture that most people will ever have the opportunity to read.** Your willingness to love your neighbors could be the only exposure to the love of God they will ever experience.

We become the living body of Christ, we have the power to shine with the light of Christ, whenever we have the courage to go next door, to love our neighbors, but this isn’t something we need to remember in our neighborhoods…the truth of the matter is that we have neighbors wherever we go. Everywhere we go, we ought to consider the people around us, as opportunities to employ Jesus’ neighborly way. We have neighbors at work. How do you treat them? Do you know them? Love them? Does your life at work reflect the love of God or the life of Christ? What do they see in you? Are you shining with light?

Or think about your school, your classes, who are your neighbors there? What about the gym, your sports leagues, your favorite coffee shops, the neighborhood grocery store, the butcher, these are your areas of biggest influence and they become the primary avenues by which you can love your neighbors or change the world.

In Psalm 24, the Psalmist writes, **GRAPHIC: “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.”** Loving our neighbors and living a life worthy of the calling requires that we see everything around us as God’s. Wherever we go, we ought to see it as an opportunity to be invitational and to be mindful of the mission of loving others the same way God loves us, the same way we ought to care for ourselves - with great love. In Matthew 28, this is ultimately what Jesus urges his disciples to do. He pushes them to branch out, keep moving, don’t stop, but continue expanding beyond our comfort zones to reach out.

He gives us his great commission…**GRAPHIC: 18Jesus said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:18-20).**

Jesus encourages us here to not simply to love our neighbors, to go deep with them…but he calls us also to expand our understanding of who our neighbors should be. He says, go out into the world and make disciples of all nations. Go as far as you can go. Expand out as far as the east is from the west. God’s mission is one that grows deep in love, it’s a sacrificial mission, one that involves a love that is willing to die, for “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends…”

But God’s mission is also one that seeks also to reach out far and wide. Jesus’ neighborly way began as a movement of 1 or 2 people, but this handful of disciples grew and expanded to a community of 12. These twelve then lived in such a way that they were willing to set aside everything to follow Christ, to love like him…to heal, to serve, to help people like him…

The movement didn’t stop there. This community was commissioned to continue reaching out. In Luke 9, the twelve are sent out into the city. Two by two they go to neighborhoods knocking on doors, meeting new people wherever they were in order to share with them the light of Christ. These twelve come back and the next time we hear a number mentioned, we discover that the 12 have become 72.

In Luke 13, Jesus commissions those 72 to go and do likewise and they become 120. By the 2nd Chapter of Acts, as the Spirit breaks in upon this group at Pentecost, this movement continues to expand, now by the thousands, as the disciples meet people, and learn to speak in languages others can understand. **GRAPHIC:** ***This is the mission. To make disciples of all nations for the transformation of the world, which means we must continue to seek and find opportunities to meet people, invite people and love people wherever we go. Ask them to join us.***

In the 14th chapter of Luke we find a story about invitation, hospitality, and living into our mission to be evangelists by reaching out throughout the neighborhood until everyone is included. The person, we’ll refer to as the host, is a person of great faith and he wants to share it with everyone, so he’s prepared a meal, a wonderful feast and his plan was to invite people to join him for supper.

**GRAPHIC: “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come for everything is ready now.’ 18But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets. Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married and therefore cannot come.’ (Luke 14:16-21)**

So, the slave reports back to his master, nobody’s coming, and you’d think that this would be enough to bring about an end to this hosts vision for hosting a dinner party for the neighborhood, but it does nothing of the sort. No instead, this causes the host to become even more determined. He presses on…despite his resistance and rejection and as the story continues, he commands his slave to go back out into the community to bring in all the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, the lost, the lonely, the wrong people. I’ll share it with them. Still not enough came.

Hearing that there is still room, the host exclaims, “If we’re not full, then we’re not finished, because God calls us to go and make disciples of all nations…to continue pressing on making disciples far and wide for the transformation of the world.” There is still more to do, so: **GRAPHICS: Luke 14:23 – ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.’**

There are a bunch of ways to interpret this parable, but regardless of how you look at it, one thing is clear and **that’s the persistence of the host**. He is going to continue reaching out past his circles of influence into the world, until he eventually invites everyone. **GRAPHIC: People coming to the banquet.** The host understood that the earth was the Lord’s and everyone in it…and so he reaches, and reaches and reaches and he’ll do so until the table is full.

This is what rests at the heart of Jesus’ mission. This is how we all should be. **GRAPHIC: The church isn’t something simply to go to. It’s something to go and do! GRAPHIC: It’s a group of people bound together in mission to love God with everything we have and to love our neighbors in the same way.**  For us to be the church we mustn’t just become a place to go to; we need to go and do.

**GRAPHIC: Go out into the streets and compel people to come in, so that the master’s house may be filled or until this world, our neighborhoods, our work places, our coffee shops, our grocery stores, our cities and nations reflect “thy kingdom come one earth just as it is in heaven.”**

What can we do? Let’s start by knocking on our neighbors’ door.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

**Scripture Reading**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.