

## Week 5 – March 14-18

The saying, “It takes a village to raise a child” is no more true than when working with the needy. The support base that is needed when someone is transitioning from a life of poverty and homelessness needs the emotional support of others, financial support as they struggle with deposits to get their own housing, and spiritual support as they seek their spiritual needs and discover God.

# Lent



## Be Homeless

Written by Courtney McHill, United Methodist Pastor - Posted on July 8, 2013

Luke 10:25-37

<sup>25</sup>But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (NIV)

In our parable today, the lawyer asks the question, “And who is my neighbor?” This seems like a pretty logical and relevant question. The idea of neighbor could be pretty vast. If you think about it too much you might start to really get overwhelmed about this question. So I understand the lawyer wanting to get to the specifics. If we can define neighbor, than we can really make sure we know what we are doing with people.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary a neighbor is defined as, “one living or located near another.” For the dictionary a neighbor is all about location. We usually identify a neighbor as one who lives in the home next door. Can a neighbor be a neighbor without a home? We can love those around us for this definition.

Mr. Rogers asks to be our neighbor in the opening sequence of “Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood.” “Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won’t you be my neighbor?” Well, that seems like a choice to me. We could choose who to love.

But Jesus flips all definitions again. Jesus answers with a parable. If this parable were just a morality lesson, we would get rid of the Samaritan stuff. But the Samaritan stuff is there and so is the other stuff about other folks passing the guy in the ditch by. What this parable really does is tell us that anyone, everyone, any person, can be and is our neighbor. We don’t get to pick and choose. And by doing something in this scenario, the Samaritan has redefined that anyone in need is our neighbor. From the Samaritan’s point of view, the guy in the ditch becomes the neighbor.

What does this do for us today? It means that anyone in need or wandering is our neighbor. Those just outside of our doors transform what neighborhood does for us. Those without homes are not just neighbors but in our neighborhood and they don’t even need a home to become such. Every one of us is called to be neighbor. God resonates with the wandering, the homeless, and the marginalized. God is not confined to the home but bridges the gaps in the neighborhood. In return, we are called to co-mingle, to get our hands dirty, to check in and relate to our neighbor, with or without home.

**Prayer:** Lord, this age-old story is a shining example of the fact that our ‘neighbor’ has nothing to do with their location, but our proximity and ability to help. Make me a better neighbor, expanding my neighborhood to boundaries that stretch me personally as well. Amen

# What Does Real Love Look Like?

Nicki Koziarz

## Hebrews 6:10

*"God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." (NIV)*

She's a name-dropper. The kind of woman who always needs the world to know what famous person tweeted at her, liked her post or followed her on Instagram. She's always at the important meetings, the ones where the people in charge see her. And she schedules lunches and coffee dates with people who can take her career further.

We all know this woman. She's our neighbor. Our co-worker. Our ministry leader. She's everywhere. And maybe, at times, there's a little bit of this woman in each of us.

The world tells us in order to go higher we must surround ourselves with people who will take us higher. Our mommas taught us at a young age we will become like those we keep close. And in high school we grouped together with people who were like-minded.

While I understand the importance of keeping company with the right kind of people, I see Jesus taking a different approach at times as I study His life in the Bible.

It's true Jesus had good friends like His disciples, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But as I look closely at the steps of Jesus, I see He invested a lot of His time into the "least of these:" the poor, the hungry, the broken, the weak and the people who had absolutely nothing to offer Him.

Jesus always had a genuine concern and focus on people in need.

If we are always surrounding ourselves with the "best of these," how will we ever truly learn to love the least of these?

It's an honest question to reflect on as we go about our days, make our schedules and choose where to invest our energy. But I don't really know if in Jesus' eyes this concept of serving the least of these is **optional**.

God blesses us so that we may bless others. May we be compelled to take our eyes off ourselves and turn our heads to the right and to the left. Let us see those around us in need and give whatever we have to bless them.

Here are three ways to do this right now:

1. Spend time with someone who has nothing to give back to you.
2. Ask God if there's anything you have in your possession that could bless someone else.
3. Write a note of encouragement to someone who is down, sick or weary.

We don't always need to be with the "best of the best." There is life, love and opportunities to expand our souls if we will humble ourselves and become just a little bit more like Jesus today and serve the least of these.

God, help us to see those in need today. Help our lives ring loudly as we take steps to serve others more than ourselves. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me get outside my comfort zone and show me how to mingle with the "least of these," while continuing to walk with You as you give me others who are "the best of these."

# HOPE

BY JOHN NUNES

## Jeremiah 29:11

*“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

As the late Luther Seminary professor, Gerhard Forde, once put it: “It is false optimism that brings ultimate despair.”

Life can collapse without warning. Disasters strike in our personal lives as well as on a global scale.

On a frigid evening, my then 15year old son ended up hospitalized after a basketball game. As I sat in the cold emergency room from 9:30 p.m. until 4:30 a.m., consoling him in his personal pain, reports of a catastrophe unfolded on the TV screen. Haiti, barely surviving in backbreaking poverty, had absorbed a 7.0 magnitude earthquake. On my much smaller telephone screen, email messages zipped around the world.

Regretfully, we must accept the inevitably of disaster and human suffering. Evil is as real as it is often unexplainable. Yet, we are never satisfied to stand by idly watching people die. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Deeply woven into the fiber of our tradition is the conviction that all people are made in the image of God. If we accept this, we cannot be content to see people hungry or suffering.”

**PRAYER** God of hope, who heard the cries of Israelites in Egypt, hear the cries of those who suffer in a broken world. Move in us to respond to those calls swiftly with grace and mercy. AMEN.

## Just Hungry

Exodus 33:11

*Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.*

I wholeheartedly believe in divine encounters. I had one this afternoon as I was at a stop light. There was a young man standing on the corner holding a sign that said, "Just Hungry". My heart ached. I almost never carry cash but today I had a little. I know people say never to give out cash to people on the street but I don't care. I wanted to treat that man with dignity and respect. I rolled down my window and he came over to my car. He was fully coherent. I didn't detect any alcohol and at that moment he definitely wasn't under the influence of any other drug. He was tall, had long dark hair, and a beard. He could have played a role as Jesus in a church Easter production. As he said "God bless you" his open mouth revealed missing teeth. I looked him in the eyes and said, "Do you know how much Jesus loves you?" He smiled and said, "Yes ma'am. With tears in my eyes I said "I'm so sorry you're in this situation but I know Jesus loves you." I asked him his name and told him mine. I said, "Bobby, I'm going to be praying for you." He thanked me several times and I said goodbye as the light changed to green. I have no idea why that young man is in that situation. A lot of people say they're just taking advantage, or that they're going to buy alcohol or drugs with the money. It's not for me to judge. It's for me to love and pray. I am praying for his salvation and for God to send other people across his path to minister to him. God has a destiny for Bobby.

We pass by people like Bobby all the time. They aren't holding the sign that says, "Just Hungry" but without Jesus they are desperately hungry. They are lost and on their way to an eternal hell. If you're like me you desire to please God, and to know Him more and more. Intimacy with God is found in fellowship with Him, worshiping Him, reading His Word and reaching out to His children. I pray that each one of us will take every divine encounter that comes our way. It's been almost 9 years since God spoke the following to me. As I was thinking about Bobby He brought it back to my remembrance. I may or may not see Bobby again on this side of eternity but I believe he will fulfill his God given destiny.

**Prayer:** Lord, speak to me through others so I can hear You as clearly as when you spoke to

## Putting Poverty in Perspective

John 12:7-8

*Jesus answered, "Don't stop her. It was right for her to save this perfume for today—the day for me to be prepared for burial. The poor people will always be with you. But you will not always have me." (ERV)*

Scripture is clear: we are to help the poor, feed the hungry, and care for widows, orphans, and aliens among us. Yet there will always be a tug of war about our priorities in how to give—what do we give specifically and extravagantly to help the poor among us and what do we give to support other facets of the Lord's work. Each is important. Each can honor God. So let's not be critical of those who give extravagantly to any of God's work. God knows the heart of the giver and we need to rejoice in their generosity to honor him. Even more, we need to be generous with the Lord and those in need! After all, Jesus himself reminds us that when what we do to care for those less fortunate, we are actually doing it for him! (Matthew 25)

**Prayer:** Loving and gracious Father, mold my heart to be more like yours. Bless me with graciousness, generosity, thankfulness, and a forgiving spirit. Open my eyes to all that Jesus has done, is doing, and will do for me so that I will more freely share with others my love, possessions, money, and time. In Jesus' name, and because of Jesus' love, I pray. Amen. Moses, face to face.