

Getting Started Part 5

The Gospel for the City: Neighbor Love

Luke 10.25-37

I'd like to do this before sermon slot if possible. But, I can do it here if need be.*

This is a HUGE weekend here at Mercy Church! I want to start with a brief word about some news we shared at the end of last weekend's services. A fellow church in the south charlotte area came to us and presented us with the idea of their members joining the Mercy Church family and then they would gift their assets and facility to Mercy Church. They are a church by and large with older members and they knew they needed to take a drastic step to reach the next generation with the gospel. Ya'll I've been so encouraged as I've gotten to know them and I'm happy to tell you last weekend their members voted by overwhelming majority to take that drastic step and join mercy church! Now I know that leaves lots of questions that I'm not going to answer now ok. We are calling a member meeting for next Sunday May 6th to talk about it.

Hey this is a BIG day for Mercy Church. At the end of our worship service we are going to see two things happen that go really well together and are both tied to our sermon today. Today is our last sermon in the "Getting Started" series. We've said all along this series is designed for people new to church to grab hold of what it means to live out the Christian life. Today we are going to see the first step of faith a Christian takes, the step of baptism. In this step, Christians publicly tell everyone they believe the gospel message. That's the

step Mari & BJ took just a few weeks ago. Then, at the end of our service we are going to give you the chance to be a part of a collective step of faith we are taking which is to love and care for our community through serve week. That's where Mari & BJ met Christians from Mercy who shared the gospel with them and began that friendship that God used to bring them to belief. And our hope is that as we demonstrate God's love by serving our city we will see the baptism waters filled again with people finding new life in Christ.

Today we are talking about the calling of every christian in the community he/she lives in.

- This calling is THE calling God gave Israel when it was wandering in the wilderness.
- It is **the only** command Jesus tied directly to The Greatest Commandment to Love God with everything you have. Jesus said THIS calling will be the greatest apologetic for the gospel.
- It is the calling James said separated true religion from fake religion. It made the apostle John say the same thing.
- It's the calling that made Emperor Julian acknowledge in writing the impact 'godless galileans' were having among the poor in his empire as they did 'baby runs' to pick up abandoned children on doorsteps & they gave proper burials to social outcasts left dead in the streets.
- It's the calling that made Christians go into villages in the middle ages stricken with the bubonic plague to help at risk of their own lives.

- It's the calling that led William Wilberforce to sacrifice everything to bring an end the slave trade.
- It was this calling that John Mott heard D.L. Moody preaching in Chicago and compelled him to do everything he could to help the disconnected young men on the Chicago streets so he built little community centers called Y.M.C.A.'s.
- It's the calling that led mother Teresa to found the Missionaries of Charity to care for people with HIV/AIDS, leprosy, & tuberculosis.
- It's the calling that led the civil rights movement as men like Dr. King & Dr. Perkins and others desired to see all people treated as equally as they were created.
- Today this calling leads Christians against the horrible tragedies of abortion, of sex trafficking, of human rights atrocities around the world.
- This is the calling that drives us as a church and is the measuring stick by which we measure success as a church.

This calling by God straight from Christ to every one of his disciples, the calling that has done more than any other to change the face of the planet for the glory of God. The calling that brings more joy to Christians when we obey it than any other is simply:

Love Your Neighbor.

That is our big idea for today. You walk out with one thing today: God calls me to love my neighbor. Specifically, the poor and hurting in our community. In

fact it is so intertwined with God's own character, and the life he calls his people to, that there are 2100 verses in the bible that deal with our relationship to the poor. There is no way to read the bible where neighbor love is not a central calling in the lives of God's people.

But the reality is evangelicals by and large have not been known for how well they care for the poor. In fact, there is a view often said or assumed that if we understood the gospel we'd be more concerned with winning souls, not feeding stomachs. That any form of social justice type ministry is the domain of religious liberals who don't believe the gospel enough to preach truth.

Listen, we here at Mercy believe the gospel is primary and we center all our messages on that. But I want to show you today how the church reveals an incomplete understanding of the gospel when it proclaims a sacrificial love it does not demonstrate. That maybe there is a hole in our gospel we need to open our eyes to and even repent of.

I'm going to show you one encounter where Jesus explains why this is such a big deal. We are going to walk through it and then I'm going to show you WHY mercy church must actively engage with the hurting people of our community.

Luke 10.25-37

[25] Then an expert in the law stood up to test him, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Ok, First can we acknowledge this is perhaps the most important and basic religious question: **How can I know I will go to heaven when I die?** Some of you are not entirely sure about the answer to that question and today you are going to hear that answer.

Now, what you also need to know is this guy isn't being entirely honest. In fact he's actually testing Jesus. But Jesus is pretty sharp. Watch this exchange.

26 "What is written in the law?" he asked him. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, "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."

28 "You've answered correctly," he told him. "Do this and you will live."

Isn't that great? See this is the greatest commandment of the old testament. Really it was the one that sums up all the others. But think about the impossibly high standard this commandment sets:

Love your God COMPLETELY. 100% of your affections have to be on him. Every ounce of your strength should be pointed at loving him. All the time all of you loving God at the highest possible level.

THEN – you gotta love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. Which means you must always put other people's needs above your own. You must desire their good above desiring your own good. You must meet the needs of your

neighbor with all the force, joy, speed, and power that you meet your own needs.

How many of you are passing the test so far? NOT ME.

And on top of all of that...you know that you can't really command love. Love is a response to something the heart is moved by. So you don't have to command me to love my kids. I love them by instinct. Same with ping pong, baseball, and dark chocolate. I love them instinctively. But, on the other hand you can't force me by command to love something or someone I don't love. Take pimento cheese. I hate pimento cheese. You can *force* me to eat it, but you can't force me to love it. Because love is a response to something the heart is moved by.

That's this guy's problem. And really all of our problem. You can't force love. & even if you could you would never perfectly obey the impossibly high standards of loving God & others perfectly.

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

He feels the problem here. He's a smart guy. So he's asking about the neighbor in hopes of limiting the scope of the command so he has a chance to obey it.

But that still presents a problem right? Because his primary concern is for his own soul. Which in the end would mean he would be serving his neighbor ultimately to serve himself.

This is the problem that many will point out with religion. It claims to be doing good deeds but in reality I'm just loving you as a MEANS to get my own blessings.

But then Christianity comes along and says...NO you CANNOT earn your way into heaven. You are too messed up. We all are. Jesus comes to live the life we couldn't live, and then give us his righteousness.

See everything going on in here? So what does Jesus do? Well classic Jesus. Whenever somebody seems a little confused he says "alright lets slow this down and let me tell you a story." Now you gotta watch because as he does he shifts the question from who is your neighbor to how do you love your neighbor. And in answering that question he shows us what neighbor love is and where the power for it comes from.

30 Jesus took up the question and said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead.

Ok so this is a parable. Remember that. But he does make it relatable to his audience. It'd be like me saying let me tell you a story about this kid from Charlotte who went to carowinds one day. Carowinds isn't the point but it helps you understand it. Everything I've read these past few days has said the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was literally a road DOWN. It's about 17 miles long and it drops 3,000 feet in elevation. It's a rural road with plenty of spots for robbers.

31 A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Ok so I think Jesus starts with the priest because the audience would naturally sympathize with this guy a little bit. I mean after all, he's on a dangerous road and he's got important places to go to where important religious work happens. To stop and

help this guy...it would be a huge time cost AND dangerous. Who knows when the robbers are coming back.

But Jesus does say he passed by on the other side. He wants them to notice the priest avoided the hurting man.

32 In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

This guy does the same thing. Levites were like priests but didn't have quite as high a standing. But the point is becoming clear here. Remember who Jesus is talking to. A lawyer well versed in jewish tradition & scripture. A lawyer trying to figure out how to wiggle a way around the command to love your neighbor. And I think Jesus is revealing the heart of the man. I KNOW he is revealing many hearts in here. That we often pass by on the other side. We'll talk more about it in a second but for most of us it isn't ignorance that keeps us from neighbor love, it's inconvenience. We are too busy, too important, so we PRETEND WE DON'T SEE THOSE HURTING PEOPLE and we pass by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion.

Oooh. Oooh this is the twist. Jesus' listeners would have expected to hear the next guy in the line from holiest to average joe. The priest, the JV priest, they didn't help. But then regular Jewish guy stepped in and help. Be like regular jewish guy!

Instead Jesus throws in the Samaritan. A Samaritan was a half-Jew half gentile offspring of the Assyrians who had conquered northern Israel and forced Jews to intermarry. They were half-bloods or mudbloods for you HP peeps.

And these two people groups had racial violence back and forth with one another. They weren't pals. The Jews did everything they could to stigmatize Samaritans as rejects and outcasts, Samaritans responded by often robbing the Jews on their way to Jerusalem. They were even known to desecrate the temple on the eve of Passover by launching pigs into the court by catapult and having them splatter on the altar. ¹

Bottom line, like North & South Koreans they had a long history of hating each other. And then this Samaritan steps in and look what he does:

34 He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. When I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.'

He's given this guy his own bandages, his own oil & wine, used his own animal, and spent 2 months worth of money on his room and board.

36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

Jesus shifts the question and throws it back to the man. The question isn't who is your neighbor but who are you a neighbor to?

37 "The one who showed mercy to him," he said. Then Jesus told him, "Go and do the same."

There are a couple of very important reasons we need this encounter. In this encounter Jesus shows us what neighbor love looks like & our motivation for it. So I want to show you what it looks like, what motivates us, and then give a couple of action steps.

What Neighbor Love Looks Like

Remember the premise of this encounter. The lawyer was trying to limit the command to love your neighbor so that he could earn eternal life. But what limits did Jesus allow? None right. If anything in the nature of his response he expanded the definition of what it meant to practice neighbor love. Looking back at this parable I want us to see who we are called to love, when we are called to love, and how much we are called to love.²

Who are we called to love?

See it's very natural for us to offer neighbor love to those who look like us and are from the same sub-culture as us. Those who we identify with. But Jesus' story involves a Samaritan crossing an incredibly big social boundary to help this hurting Jew. Which is a big warning against those who would dare try to limit the scope of what it means to be a neighbor. Who are we called to love? Anyone in need!

¹ Little 1st century history from Dr. Greear's sermon on Luke 10 preached at Summit Church in 2017.

² These 3 questions come from Dr. Keller's sermon on Luke 10 called "Neighbors" preached at Redeemer Church in NYC. I thought they formed a great structure for helping think through this calling.

Our local outreach team here at Mercy, led by Jill Ferguson, has put together a profile of the hurting in Charlotte and the reality is you are likely going to have to cross some social barriers to love them. You should write these down.

Homeless – on a given single night last year 1,476 people were experiencing homelessness in Mecklenburg County. That’s actually down 12% from the year before. When they ran a study on Charlotte-Meck Schools a couple of years ago they found that in a single school year over 4,000 students experienced a homeless crisis at some point.

Orphans – There are currently 566 children in foster care in Mecklenburg County. 40 children seeking adoption who do not have an identified placement. The gospel says God adopted us. Came out of his way to do so. Church, we could be a part of erasing this need.

Unborn – The people in the womb whose lives are regularly taken before they are born. 125 abortions are performed everyday in Charlotte. What if we could love these mothers in such a way that we offer them a different narrative for this unplanned or undesired child? Neighbor love for both the mother and the child.

Refugees – Approximately 17,000 refugees have resettled in Charlotte in the past 20 years. That’s enough to fill up Spectrum Arena. 600-700 per year . Each year 600 – 700 arrive in Charlotte. That’s a mercy church amount of people. But they won’t walk up to you and ask for neighbor love. No you will have to cross cultural and social boundaries to help.

Human Trafficking – There is a marketplace for people, MOSTLY children to be sold as slaves to be used to satisfy the

sexual desires of people who can afford them. This is deep darkness. According to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, Charlotte is the #1 city in NC for human trafficking and among the top 8 in the US.

Disconnected Youth – Need help here

These are the people God has put in Charlotte. Hurting people and he has called us to be neighbors to them.

When are we called to love? Whenever the need arises!

We Christians can sometimes be really good at making excuses for why we do not help people in need. In fact, back in the 1700s Jonathan Edwards wrote a book called the duty of Charity and in it he listed out the most common excuses Christians give for not practicing neighbor love.

Excuse #1 – We will only help when someone is in dire need.

But the response to that is that we are called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. And we come to our own aid long before the situation is dire.

Excuse #2 – Well they brought this suffering on themselves.

Well...If you think that way...Edwards answer was that Christ came and relieved the suffering you brought on yourself. So, shouldn’t you love others like Christ loved you?

Proverbs 3.27 Do not withhold good from your neighbor when it is in your power to act.

I believe we have the responsibility and opportunity to act.

Lastly – How much are we called to love? And I believe the answer is: neighbor love is a sacrifice.

See we often say yeah I would help but I just can't afford it. I can't afford the time, my budget is too tied up. Edwards says that is **excuse #3 – I can't afford to help the man in need.**

But the answer is in Galatians 6.2 – where Paul says we are to carry one another's burdens. Which means their burdens become our burdens. And burdens are burdensome. There is no magic number like an amount of money you are supposed to give. You are supposed to give until you are shouldering the burdens of others. The Samaritan sacrificed SO MUCH for this Jew his people had told him to hate. He sacrificed TIME, Clothing, Oil & Wine, Lots of his own money. I know some of you give a lot but are you giving in a way that it is sacrificial to you?

That's how the gospel goes forward. Church the gospel always goes forward through personal sacrifice. Jesus' love was a sacrificial love. And everytime since, when the gospel has gone forward to someone else it has gone through someone or a group of people sacrificing comfort, convenience, time, money, relationships to share the gospel with someone else.

See Mercy Church this is just core to what it means to follow Jesus. The church is God's demonstration community. That means loving people you wouldn't otherwise love, even if they brought hardship upon themselves, and helping said people so much that a sense of burden and sacrifice falls on you. When we love we are demonstrating God's love. It's what we do! There is a danger we can get distracted with our religious activities and miss the very heart of what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus warned his followers against that

[23]"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, and yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things should have been done without neglecting the others. Matthew 23.23

Are you loving your neighbor!? Are you seeking justice for the hurting? A couple of times a year we do something called ServeWeek. Where we introduce you to organizations we are partnering with so that you can practice neighbor love year round. Serve week starts May 9. We are ending our service out on the patio today so that you can meet reps from these organizations and find one to volunteer with during Serve Week. Take a step.

Why we love our neighbors

See the twist in Jesus' story is making the Samaritan the hero. That's what makes it hard to swallow for the Jewish man. If he wanted to *just* give an example to emulate he would have used a priest, a Levite, and an upstanding Jewish man and said 'be like the good Jewish man.' But the Jewish man would never identify with the Samaritan. So why use a Samaritan?

What if the reason he used somebody so different from the legal expert is because Jesus wanted him to identify not with the Samaritan but with the guy bleeding on the side of the road. What if you were dying on the side of the road and your only hope was an act of free grace from an enemy who doesn't owe you any mercy? An act of neighbor love from someone who owes you the exact opposite of neighbor love? Would you want that grace?

What if the true good Samaritan is Jesus himself? Jesus got up on the cross to take our suffering that we had brought on ourselves. And he poured himself out at ultimate cost to himself in order to save us.

And Jesus is saying if you believe that...what would your life look like when you encounter people in need?

He's not giving the lawyer a new rule to follow he's showing the lawyer a new reality. That Christ has shown radical love toward us. And if we receive that love, embrace it, then we will become generous givers of neighbor love toward any in need.

The one internal adjective in the whole narrative is where it says the Samaritan saw him and "had compassion." The priest and the levite didn't have that compassion even though they had religion. And Jesus is saying you will never have truly selfless compassion until you receive the compassion of Christ for you. Do you know God's love for you?

You can receive it today. In a minute we are going to baptize people. I couldn't be more excited. Every person will be publicly saying YES, I believe I was the dying man. And I didn't deserve God's love but he gave it to me anyway. And because he died for my sins I am forgiven of those sins!

EVERY CHRISTIAN IN HERE HAS ONE COMMON STORY! NOT that we were the Samaritan. But that we were dying. And the GREAT Samaritan came for us. I wasn't just dying, I was dead...he gave me new life!