

UHPC WORSHIP JULY 14, 2019

SERMON TOPIC: “WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?”

--This is a question we might all ask ourselves, for sometimes we may assume too much. We may be inclined to think that only the person who lives next door to us is our neighbor. We may think that those who are members of the same church are our neighbors. Yes, that should be so, but not always. Let us consider the question: **“Who is our neighbor and to whom ought we to be neighborly?”** Jesus helped a self-righteous lawyer to find this out for himself. It may help the rest of us to decide once and for all who is truly our neighbor. As Christians who are to be light and salt in the world, may God help us to seize the opportunity to be a good neighbor whenever and wherever, it arises!

In the text from the book of Amos Chap. 7, we hear a pronouncement of harsh judgement against God’s own people, Israel. This was mainly because they had become oblivious and disobedient to the first and second Commandments of God. They had become persistently unjust, and cruel to one another and to foreigners in their midst. Therefore, through the mouth of a relatively unknown herdsman and dresser of Sycamore Trees- Amos, Jehovah God sent a horrific message to warn His people. Because of their constant idolatry, injustice, oppression of the poor, partiality against the weak and the innocent, God told Amos to tell them that God’s wrath would be unleashed upon them if they did not change. The foundations of the earth were shaking because of the unbridled injustice throughout the land. Is it possible that what we have been seeing in various parts of this nation might have something to do with the blatant injustices being practiced in high places against babies, mothers, and refugees, racism...etc.?

God told Amos to tell them that their self-indulgence, complacency, and open disregard for the Law, would bring them pestilence, famine, and destruction. Can anyone perceive any similarity in our own time and society? Some may say it is just “Mother Nature” acting up. The quaking of the earth, the blustering and uncontrollable fires, and outbreak of various diseases, and much more—are these just coincidences? REALLY?

Earlier in Chapter 7 of Amos, we hear the LORD showing Amos a measuring instrument called a **“Plumb-line.”** In most cases when the Bible mentions measurements of weights and boundaries, it has to do with judgement. Amos was being sent to tell Israel that their God was about to judge their houses, their tribes, and their sanctuaries. Disaster would come upon the very land. WHY? –Because of their injustice to the poor, the needy, the oppressed, the foreigner, the innocent, the destitute, to one-another, showing partiality to the rich and powerful, and many more evil and wicked deeds. **IF THEY DID NOT CHANGE COURSE, GOD WOULD VISIT THEM IN TERRIBLE WAYS THAT THEY WOULD REGRET FOR A VERY LONG TIME.**

We hear a similar cry for righteous justice in Psalm 82 where the Psalmist addressed people doing injustice and showing partiality to the powerful against the innocent, the destitute, the weak, and the oppressed. God, through the Psalmist urged those judges and others in authority to judge uprightly to defend the innocent, the poor, and the oppressed. If things did not change, God would visit them with His Judgement.

However, when Amos went out preaching and prophesying, the Priest, Amaziah of Bethel, sent a message to King Jeroboam to have him silenced and to drive him out town because he was saying hard words to the people that they could not bear. He was saying that King Jeroboam would die by the sword, and Israel would be taken into exile if things did not change swiftly. But Amos did not quit. He continued to carry the message of the LORD, and told Amaziah, the priest, that because of his rejection of the prophetic word of God and against God’s messenger, his wife would become a prostitute his children would fall by the sword, and he himself would die in an unclean land. **THIS IS ROUGH STUFF. BUT FOR THOSE TIMES IT WAS THE WORD OF GOD.** God did not want his message “sugar-coated” so God took an inexperienced farmer and herdsman, without any prophetic training or lineage to pronounce his judgement against His own people. As we Look back at the topic for today, we can see that God was thoroughly upset about the wickedness among His people who saw nothing wrong in doing evil to one another and to others. **Injustice against tribes, relatives, family, prophets, priests had become the norm.** WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT NEIGHBORS? WHERE IN THE TEN COMMANDMENTS DOES GOD SPEAK ABOUT HOW TO TREAT NEIGHBORS?

Jesus addressed the question asked by a presumptuous lawyer who at first wanted to test Jesus by asking Him: **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Jesus asked him what did the Commandment say? The Lawyer rattled it off verbatim. Jesus told him he was right: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and your neighbor as yourself.” Then he told the lawyer to go and do like-wise and he would inherit eternal life. But that did not seem to be enough for him. **So, in order to justify himself, or prove himself to be smart and self-righteous,** he pressed on to ask Jesus: **“AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?”**

So, Jesus told him a parable about the “Good Samaritan a Levite and a Priest.”(Luke 10: 29-37) Then Jesus asked him to answer his own question. Again, the lawyer answered correctly: “The one who showed mercy.” So, who are our neighbors? **Clearly it is those who do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.** The Levite and the Priest were in a hurry and did not want to get dirty, although they were Jewish just like the man laying half dead on the sidewalk. Yet they walked by on the other side. The man could have been a member of the synagogue he was in a hurry to get to. He could have been from the family a door or two away from their own homes and neighborhood. However, they would never know it, for they were only concerned about themselves. They were on a mission but forgot to practice the First and Second Commandments on which hang all the Law and the Prophets. They didn’t have time for the dying man.

However, a Samaritan, who historically was the arch enemy of the Jews, saw the dying man. He stopped and investigated. He was on a mission too, but he had compassion and took pity on this dying man. He, who was a foreigner and a staunch enemy, stopped, poured oil and wine on the man’s wound, bound it up, put him on his donkey, took him to the nearest inn, paid the fee, asked the inn-keeper to take care of him until he completed his journey and returned. He would pay any additional cost if any. **WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR AND TO WHOM ARE WE NEIGHBORS?**

This is not just a parable, but a lesson for all of us who sometimes get too busy to stop and see about the wounded, bleeding, and dying we encounter along our daily life’s journey. Sometimes it is those we consider to be our enemies who will stop to show mercy, pity, and

compassion. Let us pause today and re-assess what it means to be a neighbor to someone in need, or to understand who is truly our neighbor? THIS MATTER OF BEING A NEIGHBOR was so important that God made it the commandment next to the first. After loving God with all our being, the second was attached ... to love our neighbor as ourselves. Our neighbor may be all the way from South America, Mexico, China, Venezuela, Europe, or just down the block. They may be those we consider intruders coming in to upset our beautiful country and wealthy lifestyle. On this very day... The Lord's Day, no less; I.C.E. is out searching for our neighbors from foreign lands, planning to destroy families and to tear children from their loved ones. HOW CAN WE BE NEIGHBORS? Well for one thing, we are in the right place at the right time, doing the right thing of worshipping. SO, LET US PAUSE NOW AND LIFT UP AN OUTCRY UNTO THE LIVING GOD AGAINST THIS EVIL THAT IS ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE RIGHT NOW!!! WE CRY: LORD JESUS CHRIST, LORD JESUS CHRIST, LORD JESUS CHRIST, WE IMPLORE YOU TO INTERVENE AND TO INTERRUPT, TO DEFEND THOSE WHO ARE UNDER ATTACK BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND THEIR SERVANTS. ARISE, O GOD AND JUDGE THE WICKED WE PRAY. PROTECT THE INNOCENT, THE BABIES, THEIR MOTHERS, AND THOSE WHO ARE TRUE REFUGEES, WE BESEECH YOU. By faith and with thanksgiving, we say: AMEN! This is our first line of defense and action. But we need to have a strategy and a plan in case we should we see a crying or lost child. would we extend compassion, pity, and love, comfort, etc.? OR will we pass by on the other side? Would we take him/her at an inn, a shelter, a hospital, a precinct, or if possible, find a home for such a one?

I WOULD ENCOURGE THIS AND ALL CHURCHES TO TRY HARDER TO BECOME MORE LIKE THE GOOD SAMARITAN IN OUR DAY AND TIME. We don't often have a plan, but a plan may be awaiting us. As Christians who say we embrace the Ten Commandments and the Great Commission, are we truly ready to live it and to put it into action? Should the Levites be concerned only about the Levites, and the priests only about the priests? In these days of evil pervading our land, our politics, even some churches, it is vitally important that we know how to be true neighbors and to know who are our true neighbors?

I invite us to go and do as the Good Samaritan did. Go and obey the Great Commission, the First and Second of the Ten Commandments, as well as the New Command of Christ Jesus. Go and do as Jesus would do and would have us to do on His behalf!

God bless you! God bless us all! God bless the little children and protect them from all further hurt harm and danger. LET US BE GOOD NEIGHBORS AS OFTEN AS WE CAN.

AMEN.

Brenda R. Berry (Rev.)

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