

## Pastor Roy's sermon from September 7, 2014

Someone once asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" The folks who live next door? On my road? Within a mile of my house? Five? In my town? In my zip code? County? West Shore? State? In the US? . . . What kind of commitment does it take to be a good neighbor? How much can I give? How much can I keep? What does it mean to be a good political neighbor? What public policies do I support and why?

What if I had grown up in a different family or in a different area? Would I see things differently? Would I face different challenges today? Would the minimum wage matter more to me? Would I fear the police more because of the color of my skin? Would I be afraid rather than curious when I hear a military jet go over? Might I find myself on the wrong side of a wall I am not free to cross? Would I think a lot more about where my next meal is coming from and what it might be? Might limited healthcare resources increase my fear of illness?

Many neighbors have a variety of needs. Is being a good neighbor about seizing opportunities? And how do we as church work together to love our neighbor? I believe we do. We do many things. Funeral luncheons, blood drive, caring closet, movie night, donating funds to New Hope, Habitat for Humanity, Mission of Mercy in Harrisburg, Lutheran World Relief, Heifer International, all the ministries of the ELCA and our local synod. We as individuals give toward and work with other organizations which promote the common good and friendship. ***These are ways we love by doing.***

What about by *being*? Being present to and for those around us. Present to listen. Present to care. Sharing moments of joy and sorrow. Being in it together. Being willing to bear the burdens of our neighbor by listening and caring.

Our neighbor who has lost a job, or has a chronic illness, or has a child who is struggling, or has recently lost a spouse. And "being there" is also about celebrating joys, new opportunities, new discoveries, new volunteer efforts, the successes of our children, grandchildren and so forth? But we must take the time to learn, to hear of these.

"Being there" to listen requires us to make someone else the focus of my attention. How can I support this person in their sorrow and joy? How can we work together to share our burdens? Isn't this why we gather as a community of faith? Being the community of Jesus involves mutual support. Together we lead and follow on this path of neighborliness.

As in Ezekiel and Matthew, sometimes we will need to speak prophetically, to speak against a certain violent or unjust practice. And as we speak up for Christ's mercies we can prevent great acts of violence and injustice before they arise. There are plenty of examples in the news. Events against which perhaps spiritual leaders did not speak earlier on. When the voice of true spiritual compassion is silent, when injustices are allowed to fester, then, all kinds of trouble and problems can arise within a society and between people groups. We tend to think we will always enjoy the level of peace which we now know. But in the absence of compassion, peace is lost as injustice increases.

As we listen to the voice of Christ, to the voice of the Holy Spirit we can take leadership to remind our communities that injustice is a downward slope into chaos. The Holy Spirit will not scream at us. Faithfulness is not necessarily the popular response. But faithfulness is love in action, love in presence, love which is willing to take on the burdens of our neighbor.

Today, a number of ELCA churches are taking on projects in their communities, to serve their neighbors. We chose not to do that on this specific Sunday, but let us keep an eye out for opportunities by which we as a parish and as individuals can serve our neighbors both in Dillsburg and around the world. We serve in the name of Christ--on his behalf.

We are one in the mind and mindfulness of Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.