**LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR**

Disclaimer. I’m not endorsing any particular insurance company. But I do happen to like the State Farm slogan because it has a Biblical application. I am sure you already know it. If you like, which I’m sure you don’t, I can even sing it for you. “Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.” Or, their new slogan during this quarantine might be, “Like a good neighbor, stay over there!”

Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan is a classic. Along with the Prodigal Son it is probably the most famous of Christ’s stories known by people who don’t read the Bible. It is found in Luke 10:25-37 and during this pandemic it takes on new significance. We need to hear it again and think of new applications in this present distress. We also need to ask, and then listen to Jesus when He answers, “*And who is my neighbor*?”

Lawyers are very good at looking for loopholes to argue around an obvious weakness in their case. In Jesus day “*a certain lawyer*” came to put Jesus on trial. He thinks he has Christ on the witness stand and is prosecuting a case to convict Him. Little does he know that the Son of God is the greatest Defense Attorney (“*Advocate*” – I John 2:1) in all of legal history. He will turn this case upside down and put this lawyer on trial and prosecute him to a guilty plea.

Long before the popular show *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, I grew up with the TV show in the 1950’s and 60’s called *The $64,000 Question*. Question 1 was worth $64. Question 2 doubled to $128. It kept doubling until it reached the grand prize of $64,000 (FYI for you numbers nerds – that’s a 1955 sum equal to the modern 2020 figure of $612,272 at the Bureau of Labor Statistics). Back then you couldn’t have three lifelines (Ask the Audience, Phone-A-Friend, and 50/50). It was the only show to ever knock *I Love Lucy* from the #1 ratings. I loved it for its suspense.

But if we were playing that game today, and the category was Christianity, the ultimate question for the $64,000 grand prize would be the very one this lawyer asked Jesus, “*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life*?” It was the exact same question the rich young ruler had also asked Jesus (Matt. 19:16). He, like this lawyer, lost the grand prize by walking away, content with the consolation prize of riches on earth, but missing heaven.

When this lawyer felt like his case was unraveling after Jesus told him to love God and love his neighbor, he cross-examined the Lord with this loophole question, “*And who is my neighbor?*” The famous story of the priest, Levite and Samaritan challenged him to answer his own question when the Lord asked, “*Who do you think was the true neighbor*?” His response, “*He who showed mercy*.” I’m sure with a loving smile Jesus brought this trial to close by saying, “You now have your answer. The defense rests.” The prosecutor became the defendant and was found guilty as charged. And, like the rich young ruler, I doubt he ever got a retrial by finding love in his heart for his neighbor. He could have never worked for State Farm Insurance. And he could never have entered the Kingdom of heaven.

Mr. Rogers might sing, “It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood, A beautiful day for a neighbor, Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Would you be my neighbor?” Everybody might want to be a neighbor to Fred Rogers. Nice tie. Nice sweater. Nice sneakers. Nice smile and attitude. So-so singing voice. But not everybody is like Mr. Rogers. Some are like those thieves and thugs. Some are like the hypocritical priest and Levite who showed no sympathy for the dying man and “*walked by on the other side*.” But some are like this half-breed Samaritan for whom it says, “*When he saw him he had compassion*.”

There seems to be no question this lawyer sympathized with the action of the priest and Levite but couldn’t bring himself to be honest when Jesus asked him who his neighbor was. “*The man who showed mercy*” was obviously the correct answer. I’m sure he gagged when he said that. The rich young ruler walked away from eternal life “*for he had great possessions*.” The lawyer walked away from eternal life, for he had great pride. Which leads us to answer the question, “Who is your neighbor?” Just as this lawyer had three options, so do we.

1. **Lust**. Represented by the Thieves. Attitude: “What is yours is mine, I will take it.”

2. **Legalist**. Rep by the Priest / Levite. Attitude: “What is mine is mine, I will keep it.”

3. **Love**. Rep by the Good Samaritan. Attitude: “What is mine is yours, I will give it.”

Can you not see how these three options are the predominant attitudes of all men? We are by our thoughts, words and deeds revealing either Lust, Legalism, or Love. While there might be a few folks in our world who tip their cap to the thieves (an old saying is “There’s honor among thieves”), not many would sympathize with their attitude of stealing and beating fellow human beings. *What is yours is mine, I will take it.*

But truth be told there are a great many folks who would sympathize with the religious priests and Levites who did not want to get involved in the plight of the beaten man. After all they were likely walking “*from Jericho to Jerusalem*” like this man had been doing, heading to perform their services at the temple. They no doubt salved their conscience by telling themselves they couldn’t take a chance becoming “unclean” by touching blood. They thought, “I’m sure somebody else will come along and help the poor fellow.” Can you not hear them mutter while shaking their head, “Bless his heart.” That always makes you feel better. *What is mine is mine, I will keep it.*

Not many folks fit into the third option. These are the few who would be neighbor to anyone and everyone, regardless of race, color, social or economic status. They can read the description of love in I Corinthians 13:1-8 with a smile on their face, song in their heart, prayer on their lips, and dirt on their hands. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve (Matt. 20:28), so His disciples never hesitate to gird a towel and stoop to wash dirty feet (John 13). “*As you have opportunity, let us do good to all men*…” (Gal. 6:10). It’s in our DNA. *What is mine is yours, I will give it*.

Ever heard of Lenny Skutnik? Hardly anyone had until he received a standing ovation at the 1982 State of the Union Address of Ronald Reagan. He recognized Lenny as the hero of the Air Florida crash into the 14th St. Bridge and then its plunge into the Potomac River of Washington DC. The water was 33 degrees. Priscilla Tirado was going into hypothermia and shock. She would drown. Lenny dove into the icy waters and saved her life. I still remember it. Hundreds of people were standing on the shore, but only Lenny risked his life to save an unknown person. Lenny was a good Samaritan.

Like a good neighbor, are you there? When someone, anyone, needs help (whether it is emotional, physical, financial, or spiritual) are you there? We are now living in strange times, yet they provide us doors of opportunity to be Good Samaritans. It is on this very basis of whether we care enough to get involved that we will be judged (see Matt. 25:14-30). *“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment”* (Jam. 2:13).

Until tomorrow… Like a good neighbor, Jesus is there. And I’m right beside Him!

I love you.

Rick