

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Luke 10:25-37

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10) Analysis by Stephan K. Turnbull

25Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

DIAGNOSIS: Neighborless

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Having No Neighbors*

“Who is my neighbor?” the lawyer asked Jesus, trying to win the argument by asking a difficult and perhaps dangerous question. We might ask the same question now, but with a much simpler intent. “Seriously, who are those people who live in the house next door? What are their names?” We don’t show mercy to our neighbors (v. 37); we don’t even know them. We generally don’t show them anything but our taillights as the garage door closes.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Wanting No Neighbors*

Sometimes we lament the atomization and alienation in our culture, but, given how we continue to perpetuate and even exacerbate the condition, deep down we must like it this way. If we acknowledged our neighbors, we might feel obligated to love them. And that would be messy and hard. Better to keep them at a distance. Better to rationalize them away by asking questions and looking for excuses.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dead and Neighborless Forever*

But God is not satisfied with or distracted by our excuses. His command to love our neighbors is as simple and straightforward as our failure to do it. And so we suffer the curse that comes with disobedience to the law: death. Do this and you shall live. Don’t do it, and you shall die. We aren’t just alienated from each other, but from our God, forever.

PROGNOSIS: A Good Neighbor

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Found by Good*

Neighbor

But there is One who has been a neighbor all along, even to us. When we have been left for dead, Jesus heals our wounds at the cost of his own, a far greater price than the two days wages paid by the traveling Samaritan. Jesus gives us his own health, his own life, his own righteousness and faithfulness in place of our failures. And so God in his grace regards us not in light of our own willful neighborlessness, but in light of Christ's perfect faithfulness.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Finding Neighbors*

And regarding us by Christ's faithfulness, God makes us so. Having been loved by the ultimate Neighbor, our hearts begin to want to know better the One who makes it possible: Christ. And then, knowing Christ, we find ourselves taking to the road, looking for neighbors to love. We are no longer inclined to pass by on the other side (antiparelthen) as the priest and Levite did, but rather to cross over to them (proselthon) with Samaritan-like commitment to serve. We grasp Jesus' creative reframing of the lawyer's question, meant to show us that it's not so much about finding a neighbor worthy of love, as being a neighbor who loves.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Loving Neighbors*

And so we begin to act like the Samaritan who truly is a neighbor. We see everywhere those who have been stripped and left for dead by the people and forces in our world who rebel against God and steal life; and we cross whatever street it is that separates us from them. We spend our time, resources, and reputation to heal their wounds and restore them as Jesus restored us. Because Jesus has been our neighbor, we "go and do likewise" (v. 37).