

From the Corner

Love Thy Who?

Several years ago, our congregation sold T-shirts that said, "Love Thy Neighbor" on the front and a sample list of the kinds of neighbors we were to love on the back. It was a very popular shirt. Once, while in the checkout line at Kroger I could feel the energy building as I heard comments coming from people behind, regarding the list of neighbors. A few people found the list offensive and wanting me to debate with them. Others were so excited about the list they wanted to know where they could get a T-shirt. My favorite moment was when a group of people in line behind me, who didn't even know each other, entered into a discussion about how hard it is to love some of their neighbors.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount found in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew is perhaps the most well-known portion of the New Testament. It is a prophetic and challenging lesson. The teaching of loving our neighbors didn't originate with Jesus. You will find that Jesus pulled this from his Jewish roots and love of the Torah, the Law, the *Pentateuch* (five scrolls) the first five books of the Old Testament. In the book of Leviticus in chapter 19 (the Holiness regulations) in verse 18 the writer says,

"Never seek revenge or hold a grudge toward your relatives. You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. I am Your God."

Then again in verse 34 the writer continues with these words,

"The foreigner who lives among you must be treated like one of your own. Love them as you love yourself, for you too were a foreigner in the land of Egypt. I am Your God."

The depth of these verses and the writings around them has something to say to us today. Taking them from the written page to the pavement of life and inter-personal relationships could change us for good. At the least, give us a place to begin to work on ourselves and our community when it comes to the common good. Our humanity challenges us when faced with such beliefs as loving our neighbors and foreigners. As always Jesus pushes us towards being a better community. He even says,

"But I tell you, love you enemies and pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are children of God. For God makes the sun rise on the bad and good alike; God's rain falls on the just and the unjust. If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that? Don't tax collectors do as much? (Matthew 5.44-46)

Jesus' ideal community is neighbors who love one another. Think about it.

Journey well,

Pastor Keith

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