

Won't you be my Neighbor

Sermon 2017-10-29 - Year A - Pentecost 10-26 - The Rev. Christopher Klukas
Exodus 22:21–27; Psalm 1; 1 Thessalonians 2:1–8; Matthew 22:34–46

Mr Rodgers

- “The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ordained Fred Rogers as “an evangelist to work with children and families through the mass media.”¹
- “But how do we make goodness attractive? By doing whatever we can do to bring courage to those whose lives move near our own--by treating our 'neighbor' at least as well as we treat ourselves and allowing that to inform everything that we produce.”²

What does it mean to love my neighbor?

- It is easy to love people who are lovable. It is easy to love people who can love us back. It is harder to love when the relationship is not reciprocal.
- 1 John 4:19-21 - “We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar...”
- “Israel must care for the poor and helpless, because YHWH cares for them: that is his very nature.”³ Our love for others flows from God’s love for us. We are called to grow into the full stature of Jesus Christ, and part of that is loving the world as he loves the world.
- Three categories of vulnerable people are mentioned in this passage from Exodus.
 - V. 21 A sojourner was someone who had left their homeland for some reason, whether political, economic, etc., and had come to dwell in the land of Israel.
 - Sojourners could not own land and thus had to rely on the kindness of strangers to give them work, thus they were vulnerable. The OT law afforded these folks certain protections, usually reminding the Israelites that they were once sojourners in Egypt.
 - This OT emphasis on protecting and caring for the sojourner should be taken into consideration as we think about our own immigration policies and how we care for immigrants, whether documented or undocumented.
 - V. 22 Widows and fatherless children.
 - Ancient Israel was a very patriarchal society where women and children were to be cared for and protected by their father or husband. Without this protector, women and children were quite vulnerable.
 - A contemporary parallel might be single mothers, children of single parents, and children with no parents at all.
 - V. 25-27 The poor
 - Here the instruction is with regard to the lending of money to the poor, making sure that any such loans are without interest and that even the cloak given in pledge be returned by nightfall.

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/march6/1.38.html>

² <http://mentalfloss.com/article/31936/20-gentle-quotations-mister-rogers>

³ R. Alan Cole, Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary (vol. 2; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 182.

- Today, payday lenders and credit card companies are institutionalized examples of this kind of prohibited oppression.
 - From this basic framework, we might also recognize other vulnerable people in our own day like the elderly, those with disabilities, and unborn children.
- V. 23-24, 27 God's wrath is aroused when he sees the vulnerable being oppressed.

Bystanders or Protectors

- "The bystander effect...is a social psychological phenomenon in which individuals are less likely to offer help to a victim when other people are present. The greater the number of bystanders, the less likely it is that any one of them will help."⁴
 - Raymond Zack: On Memorial Day, 2011, 53-year-old Raymond Zack walked neck-deep into the waters of San Francisco Bay stood there for almost an hour. Firefighters and police responded but did not enter the water. Dozens of civilians on the beach did not enter the water, expecting public safety officers to conduct a rescue. Eventually, Zack collapsed in the water. Finally, a good samaritan entered the water and pulled him to shore. Zack died.⁵
 - Mr. Rodgers "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers--so many caring people in this world."⁶
- We are also called to speak out for those who can't speak for themselves, to defend those who are defenceless, to be strong for those who are weak.
 - "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (Psalm 82:3-4 ESV)
 - "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." (Isaiah 1:17 ESV)
- This is what love for our neighbor looks like.

Conclusion

- Food Giveaway and Thanksgiving Baskets are a huge way in which we do the very things the lessons today are challenging us to do.
- We should always be looking for more opportunities, both as a church and as individuals, to care for the poor and defend the weak.
- We are not God, we can't do everything, but we can all do something.
- Mr. Rodgers "We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say, 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.' Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes."⁷

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bystander_effect

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bystander_effect

⁶ <http://mentalfloss.com/article/31936/20-gentle-quotations-mister-rogers>

⁷ <https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/10-mr-rogers-quotes-you-need-read>