



April 22, 2020

THINK ABOUT THY NEIGHBOR

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in response to a question. During a discussion about the commandment to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” someone asked Jesus “who is my neighbor?”

This question is worth some serious thought, because it is easy to develop a narrow definition of neighbor that only includes friends and co-workers and people we already know. So Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, a story that surely changed the perception of who counts as a neighbor.

Thinking about our neighbors requires some work. Peter Marty, a pastor and editor of *Christian Century*, wrote in a column recently about how neighborliness is being nurtured during this time of the coronavirus. A few years ago, Mark J. Dunkelman published a book titled *The Vanishing Neighbor: The Transformation of American Community*, in which he described how people tend to invest their relational energy on their inner circle of family and close friends, and on an outer circle of distant acquaintances, nurtured online. This leaves little energy for the middle circle of...you know, our actual neighbors. We know more about the lives of old school classmates than we do about the people who live next door.

But now this crisis is helping to change that perception. People are saying “hello” on neighborhood walks. They are checking on the neighbor who may need help to get groceries. They are thinking more about the lives of the people who work at the stores that need to stay open, or used to work at the places that needed to close.

This is good practice. It’s hard to “love thy neighbor” if that neighbor doesn’t even come to mind. When we get better at thinking about our neighbors, we begin to see what it would mean to love our neighbors who live next door, or around the corner, or in Chelsea.

Love thy neighbor starts with a change in perception.

Peace,

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Senior Minister