

Who is My Neighbor? And How Do I Love Them?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning, I'm Helen and I'm part of the Christ Church Youth Group. Today's scripture reading is from the book of Luke, chapter 10, verses 25 to 37, as printed in your liturgy. A reading from the gospel according to Luke. On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

Teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? What is written in the law, he replied. How do you read it? He answered, 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 love your neighbor as yourself. You've answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live. But he wanted to justify himself. So he asked Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

[1 : 16] In reply, Jesus said, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. Look after him, he said, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.

Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?

The expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him. This is the gospel of the Lord.

[2 : 21] Praise to you, O Christ. Thank you, Halen. That was a wonderful first time reading from you. Look forward to you doing that many more times with us. Praise God for our youth ministry.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew, and again, I'm one of the pastors here. And I'm happy to be bringing God's word to you. Our lead pastor, Jonathan, he's coming back. Don't worry, he's coming back.

But today, he's not here, so it's me again. And just a heads up, it's a little bit longer today because he's not here, so I get to do what I want. And just want to give you that heads up, all right?

Well, let's go to the Lord in prayer first. Father, by your word and by your spirit, would what you have to say to us, would it mess us up and make us whole at the same time?

Would these words of Jesus bring deep conviction of sin here at this church, at Christ Church East Bay, and would it lead us to radical repentance, changed lives, and most of all, holy compassion that makes a difference in the world in the name of Christ?

[3 : 28] And show us, God, not only the depths of our sin through this passage, but the heights of your grace and compassion toward us in Christ, your Son. Amen. Open our eyes to his beauty and his glory, and how right it is to worship him and follow him as the Savior King he is, who gave his life, his whole self, to make us whole.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. So, we're opening up a passage in Luke's Gospel that's, you know, it's become so famous and formative that the very meaning of the word Samaritan has been redefined in the English-speaking world, right?

Jesus was that amazing of a storyteller and teacher. He literally changed the history and the language of the world so that even when people today might know very little about him, as soon as their car breaks down and a stranger comes in the rain and helps them fix that tire or drive them to wherever they need to go, what do they say?

They say, wow, what a good Samaritan, right? And they say it with honor, right? It's an honorable compliment because being a good Samaritan is a virtue that's still celebrated across all of society. Even if few of us actually live up to this ideal, no matter what religion you belong to, no matter your ethnic culture, no matter your socioeconomic status or what side of the political aisle you lean on, we'd all say that the world would be better, right, if there were more good Samaritans around, strangers helping strangers in need with compassion and hospitality, generosity, care, and sacrifice.

[5 : 07] So again, this is a super famous and very familiar, well-loved passage of Scripture, but I also think that's what makes it challenging for a preacher and also for all of us trying to take seriously these words of Jesus and hear them with fresh ears.

This passage has just become so familiar and formative for the Western world that we come to it already knowing how the story ends, unable to feel in our bones how shocking and radical and foolish it would have sounded to its original hearers, and we come to it just assuming that, yeah, we already got the point.

Like, okay, of course, the pastor's going to preach on the Good Samaritan today, and it's pretty straightforward. Jesus tells a story about a dude who shows up and shows a lot of love toward a stranger, and then he goes, go and do likewise, got it, right, love my neighbor, already knew that, thanks for the reminder, okay?

It's just so familiar, it's not fresh to us. And honestly, it probably doesn't inspire us that much toward the high standard of love that God calls us to live by, not just as followers of Jesus, but as human beings made in his image and called to honor the image of God in one another.

And even if this passage does hit us with conviction and maybe even guilt and shame, like, even if you do take seriously how radically loving this Samaritan was, and you take seriously Jesus' command to go and do likewise, because that's what Jesus says we must do to inherit eternal life.

[6 : 33] Man, even if this passage does convict you, what are we supposed to do with that? Who can truly live up to that? Who can love so completely, so sacrificially, day in, day out, every day?

Who can love with this kind of a love? Maybe for some of us, we're like, I mean, I'm going to try. I'm going to try to love more, but I also feel pretty defeated and crushed by this high standard, and I'm 100% sure I'm going to fail over and over and over again.

I'm going to go into my workplace this week with good intentions, but I'm going to lose it. I'm going to be short with that annoying colleague, right? I'm going to go into my home. I'm going to try to serve my spouse. I'm going to try to be patient with my children, but I just know I'm not going to be able to sustain it.

And these thoughts just kind of color how we read this parable, right? Like, yeah, I want to do it. I want to live wholly and selflessly all day, every day, but man, it also seems kind of impossible.

Who could love like this? Seriously, how could I ever consistently love like this? Is Jesus really demanding this, or is he just, you know, really, really encouraging us to try our hardest? Well, in case you thought that the main point today was going to be, go love your neighbor, try harder.

[7 : 48] Come on, guys. You can do it. Love your neighbor more, or else no eternal life. In case you thought that that was it, the real point, I think, or the question for us this morning is what is it, what is it that will truly transform us into people of radical, self-giving, self-sacrificial love?

The kind of people we all know that we were meant to be. The kind of people we all want to be. The kind of people we all want our children to be. I think we all know deep down eternal life. New creation life is a life lived with this kind of love.

But the question is, how do we live like that? How do we live like new creation people, rather than being stuck as fallen creation people, unable to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and unable to love our neighbors as ourselves?

Because again, we're all agreed, even if you're not a Christian, even if you don't believe in God, whatever religion or lack thereof that you identify with, we're all agreed that the world would be a better place if there were more good Samaritans, if we all loved as we ought, with the fullness of our lives.

But the question is, how? How? What's it going to take to produce good Samaritans out of selfish sinners like you and me and the rest of our neighbors?

[9 : 04] That's where we open up our text. Let's see what verse 25 has to say. On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. In the Greek, it's the word entrap, to entrap Jesus. Teacher, he asked, probably, you know, feigning respect and teachability.

He says, teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? So here's a guy who thinks he knows better than Jesus. He's an expert in the scriptures that Jesus teaches from. And so he subjects Rabbi Jesus to a theology exam.

Okay? And the question on the exam is, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Or what must I do to be an heir of eternal life? This was a frequent question that the theologians, the Jewish theologians of that day loved to discuss.

And probably also a very weighty question that occupied the minds of many Jewish people, this question about eternal life. And listen, what we need to understand about eternal life is that, contrary to what many of us might understand it to be, it's not some heavenly, disembodied, timeless eternity.

That's Plato and not the Bible. Okay? When people ask Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life? They're not simply asking, how can I escape to that heavenly destination outside of this world when I die, or how can I live forever and avoid death or hell?

[10 : 13] No, they're asking about how they can enter into the new world of the new age that God was going to bring, the age of justice and peace and shalom. How can I enter the perfect and imperishable kingdom of God, the new creation where there are no tears and no fears?

Eternal life here is way more than living forever, going to heaven, or avoiding hell. It's about belonging to God and his consummate new creation in the age to come. That's what they're asking about.

So this was indeed a weighty and important question that Jesus was going to take seriously, even if his questioner had bad intentions. And what Jesus basically says is, well, you're an expert in the law.

You know the answer. We both submit to the same divinely inspired authoritative scriptures. I'm not here teaching anything different. Verse 26, what is written in the law? He replied. How do you read it? And this expert in the law gets the answer right.

It's the same answer Jesus gives when other people ask him the question. In verse 27, the law expert answered, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, with all your mind, the greatest commandment, right?

[11 : 17] And then the second one that is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus applauds this man's theologically correct answer. Verse 28, you have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.

He basically says, yep, you just said it. Go do it. Love. Love God. Love your neighbor. It's agape. Now, at this point, the law expert is sure that he's at least got the first commandment down, right? He knows who he's supposed to love the most, Yahweh. No other gods before him. But as someone who pays close, close attention to the details of the law, he notices in the second greatest commandment, this is trickier than the first commandment, because who exactly is my neighbor? That can be interpreted in a lot of ways, my next door neighbors, my regional neighbors, my national neighbors, my international neighbors, my extraterrestrial neighbors. Like how far out does this neighbor love thing go?

He was trying to figure out or at least get Jesus' take on just how many people he was responsible for loving as he loved himself. And why?

[12 : 20] Well, it says because he was seeking to justify himself, seeking to declare himself righteous and worthy in the eyes of God and others by identifying God's standard and then meeting it himself. Verse 29 says, but he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

So he's trying to pinpoint the standard, right? He's trying to pinpoint the standard of this love your neighbor as your self-command. He's trying to discover what are its limits? Who am I actually and reasonably responsible for loving?

Because he knows that this commandment, just on the face of it, that's a tall order if it's just that, right? Loving my neighbor as myself? That's near impossible to love anyone as myself.

So surely this can't just mean anyone and everyone, right? Surely there are limits to who my neighbors are and to who I am responsible to love and to care for and to alleviate their needs. This law expert is looking for an interpretation of the law by which he can justify himself. And honestly, he's looking for and hoping for a limited interpretation of this law of love so that he can say that he meets the standard.

[13:27] Like many of us, he's hoping for a low standard so that he can actually meet it with his lifestyle. He's hoping that he doesn't have to love as much as this commandment could possibly be demanding.

But Jesus, right? But Jesus is not a rabbi with low standards and neither is his God and Father in heaven whom he represents. And so seeing that this law expert is trying to justify himself, seeing him trying to lower the standard of love and redefine who our neighbors are, and seeing this law expert's confidence in his own ability to meet the standard and earn for himself eternal life, Jesus has a story to tell.

Not just to answer this man's question, but to reveal the heart of God and the hubris of this expert in the law. Verse 30. In reply, Jesus said, A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers.

They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. So imagine the scene. The Jericho road is known to be steep and dangerous. It's a mountainous territory full of crags and caves, twists and turns.

And because it's a perfect hideout for bad actors to hide and strike and then escape with great ease, it's known as the way of blood. It's like the darkest alley in the worst parts of the city, only the nearest streetlight is miles away.

[14:52] And so, of course, a lonely traveler would be an easy target. And Jesus' listeners probably heard stories like this all the time of awful things happening on this Jericho road.

And so, of course, in this story, something awful does happen. A lonely traveler finds himself helpless, stripped, naked, shamefully, violently, beaten, bloody, forsaken, half dead, and hopeless. He will likely die here unless, one, someone happens to stumble upon him on this treacherous road that no one wants to go on. And two, that person also decides to show him compassion.

So, Jesus continues. And there are indeed glimmers of hope, actually, in the story. Three glimmers of hope. And for this Jewish traveler, two of these glimmers of hope are the exact kinds of people he could have hoped for to help him in his greatest time of need.

A priest and a Levi. Verse 31. A priest happened to be going down the same road. And when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So, too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

[15:52] These priests, and this priest and this Levite, they were exactly the kinds of people he would have expected to help him. Professional, religious people of the day called to serve God and to serve God's people and to show and represent God's love and compassion.

And in the Jewish society, priests were actually the public health officials. If you had an illness, they were the ones you went to for treatment. The Levites themselves also were responsible for distributing alms to the poor.

And yet, we find here that neither of these two individuals decide to help the helpless man on the road. And you know, if this fills you with indignation and disgust because of their lack of compassion and maybe religious hypocrisy, then Jesus has actually caught you in his trap.

And you are convicting yourself. Because the priest and the Levite, they had just as many rational reasons to pass by this half-dead man as we do when we pass by all our neighbors.

Like, how would you really have responded in this situation? If you were anxiously taking a shortcut through a dark alley, you came across a groaning, bleeding man indicating violent thugs probably around the next corner, what would you counsel your wife to do?

[17:09] What would you counsel your children to do? Truly, the wisest thing is to hurry on to safety. That's the reality for this priest and this Levite. They've stumbled upon a man with massive needs, massive needs too great for them to handle, the physical needs of his bloody wounds and his nakedness, practical needs for transportation and shelter, social needs for a companion and caretaker, emotional needs from his shame and trauma, financial needs.

He's penniless. He's going to have medical bills, spiritual needs even, as someone who might soon depart from this life to the next. Maybe the priest and the Levites thought to themselves, man, I

want to help.

I have a good heart, but I don't even know where to start. I don't think I have what it takes, or it costs me too much, more than I could afford. I don't have the finances or the skills or the time or the margin.

Imagine I've got my own story, my own agenda to tend to, and I'm not sure I have time to be a part of this man's story. Maybe the priest and the Levite had just gotten off their shifts, right, at the temple from Jerusalem down to Jericho, looking forward to getting back to their families, just trying to make it home to them without any trouble, not looking to enter anyone else's mess.

And like, what if they did try to help and this man died? Then they would be ceremonially unclean, and that would have implications for the time they spent with their family and also for their jobs and their duties in the temple.

[18:32] Was it really worth the risk to help this man? Shouldn't they preserve themselves for their family's sake and for the temple's sake? And really, what did they have to gain? No one else was around to see them be a hero, and also no one was around to see them neglect this man either.

Might as well just pass by, right? Might as well just pass by. We must not downplay the exorbitant cost and risk of helping this half-dead man and how sensible it was for the priest and the Levite to pass him by.

We do this all the time ourselves. And look, Jesus himself, Jesus doesn't even condemn these two men, the priest and the Levite. He doesn't make them out to be bad guys in the story.

They're just normal. They're you and they're me. But the question is, is that all that God wants us to be? The German theologian Dorothy Soule wrote, in Jesus' story, there are thieves and victims, specters and helpers, and Jesus intended this story for the people of the spectator or passerby type.

And isn't that us? The passerby types. This story is for us. It's meant to challenge us to be more than passersby.

[19:52] Living like the priest and the Levite might be the normal, might be the reasonable, might be the socially acceptable way to live, but Jesus always offers, he offers us always a higher, better, more beautiful way to live.

And this better way starts with how we see people. How do we see people? Look again at verses 30 and 31. It says the priest and the Levite saw the man, but still passed by. And what Jesus is pointing out here is that, sure, they both see him, but do they really see him?

They don't see him with the compassionate eyes of God, and they can't seem to see, or maybe they just refuse to see, the image of God in this man. They see him, and yet they see him as someone who they can and maybe even should pass by.

They see him as not worth their time, attention, and assistance. And this is a word for us. It's a point of application. Do we see our neighbors? Do we see our neighbors?

Do we see the people around us, the people on our paths, and do we see them with the eyes of God? Do we see the image of God all around us? You know, my dad, he's one of the most consistent and principled men that I know.

[21:00] And you know, he's particularly committed to friendliness, deference, and selfless service, all right? So if you go for a walk with him, like at Lake Chabot, you might try to have a conversation with him, but he's always interrupting the conversation, looking up at people, making eye contact with them, and saying, hey, good morning, good morning, right?

It's super annoying, actually. And what's even more annoying is I went on a trip with him one time. We were in Manhattan, all right? I had places to go. I had things I wanted to see. I'm zigging and zagging my way through the crowd, right?

Just like everyone else is. These people aren't people to me. They're obstacles to be navigated, all right? But like every few steps, oh, excuse me. Oh, pardon me. Oh, you first.

Holding the door open for like 30 people who don't even recognize the man is holding the door for them, right? That's my dad. Super annoying to be his traveling partner. But at the same time, if I reinterpret my dad's actions in the best possible light, man, what he was really doing was trying to be a consistent human being, humanizing other human beings, acknowledging the dignity and the worth and the image of God in every stranger he encountered, even in New York City, right?

This place that, yeah, we might think of as crowded and congested, but at the same time, a place that's covered with so much image of God per square foot, right?

[22 : 23] What if we saw the world like that, as covered with the image of God, people and opportunities to share the love of God with? So again, do we have eyes to see God's image in others?

Or do we permit ourselves to pass by by seeing people as less than what they're worth in the eyes of God? Think of all the people you pass every day on BART, on your commutes, all the people we pass by without recognizing the image of God in them.

And then maybe you think I'm talking about that homeless person you drive past every day. And yes, I am talking about them, but man, I'm thinking some of us are passing our spouses by and our children and our coworkers and our fellow church members and our next door neighbors.

Maybe we don't even know their names. When Jesus said to love our neighbors, he meant more than just our immediate neighbors, but certainly not less. G.K. Chesterton said, we make our friends, we make our enemies, but God makes our next door neighbor.

God is constantly putting neighbors into our path. The question is, will we see them? Do we see them? Loving starts with seeing them and seeing them with compassion.

[23 : 38] And that was the difference between the priest and the Levite and the Samaritan. They all saw the half-dead man, but what does verse 33 say? But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity.

In the Greek, you could translate this. He was filled with compassion for him. In the Greek, *splagitsomai*, all right? He saw this man and his insides churned and his heart broke and his guts ached.

It's the same word that Jesus felt when he saw the widow who lost her son. It's the same word that the father felt for his prodigal. And listen, this Samaritan's compassion likely shocked Jesus' original hearers because the Jewish and the Samaritan people, they hated and terrorized each other.

To the Jewish folks, Samaritans were heretics and half-breeds who intermingled with the pagans. And to the Samaritans, the Jewish people were self-righteous Jewish supremacists who looked down upon the Samaritans.

And if the tables were turned, a Jewish person coming across a half-dead Samaritan might take the opportunity to make him a fully dead Samaritan. And so one would have expected the same from this Samaritan toward this half-dead man lying in the road.

[24 : 52] But the Samaritan here, facing the same risks, facing the same costs as the priest and the Levite, and yet with even more racial and cultural reasons to not care, the Samaritan shows radical, unexpected, and undeserved compassion instead.

Look at verses 34 and 35. It says, he went to him. He offered friendship and advocacy to this half-dead Jewish stranger. He risked his own safety, gave physical protection, gave up his schedule, canceled his plans.

He bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, becoming dirty and bloody by personally administering medical treatment to this person who surely would have considered him as unclean just because of his race. Then he put the man on his own donkey, which meant that he probably had to walk the rest of the way.

He made his resources available. He provided transportation for this guy and found shelter. He brought him to an inn and he took care of him there, spent a whole night nursing this guy and then financially, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper.

He offered two days worth of wages for a few weeks' rent, right? He offered open-ended generosity in a situation in which the chance of extortion was high, right, from the innkeeper, but he still said, I will pay you for any expense he incurs.

[26 : 09] And on top of all this, he makes a follow-up plan. He promises to return and reimburse the extra expenses to come back and visit and he takes financial responsibility for this victim without any arrangements for repayment.

Now, have any of us loved anyone, even our own beloved family and friends, not even mentioning our enemies?

Have any of us loved anyone in the world like this? Jesus here is saying that this extravagant, radical, sacrificial love is what God not just suggests but demands of us when he tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

It's not a suggestion, it's the law of the Lord. You know, we often think of the Good Samaritan parable as a lesson on charity and mercy but it's actually just as much if not more a lesson on

justice.

Biblical justice. See, in the Bible, the word for justice doesn't simply mean punishing those who do wrong, it means treating people equitably. It means honoring the image of God in other people and giving people what they are due.

[27 : 22] Over and over again in Moses' law, it spoke of caring for widows and orphans and immigrants and the poor not as a ministry of mercy but as a society's responsibility for upholding justice.

Compassion and loving our neighbors as ourselves isn't just a matter of charity and generosity, it's a matter of justice. And so let's be real, we all fall short, don't we?

This is why we confess our failure to love our neighbors here every single week in that liturgical moment, the confession of sin, because none of us, none of us has lived up to this demand. We are neither merciful nor just in the eyes of God.

And if we take Jesus' words to this law expert seriously, we know that he couldn't justify himself and neither can we. We are guilty, guilty, guilty before this law of love that God demands.

Even with respect to the people in our lives that should be easiest to love, we have all severely missed the mark. And none of us has done anywhere close to what it takes to inherit eternal life in God's new creation.

[28 : 22] Instead, we've lived according to the ethic of a broken and fallen creation instead. So where does that leave us? Well, it leaves us at the mercy of God.

It leaves us at the mercy of God. And see, that's what distinguishes! Christianity from every other religion. Christianity isn't unique in telling us to love, to care for the need, to be good Samaritans, to be kind, loving, compassionate, and hospitable to the poor.

Virtually every religion teaches this. And it either says, oh, just try and do your best, like, it's not that big a deal, the standard's not that high, or it says, do this or else, right? And absolutely crushes us under the weight of its guilt and shame for our failure to love like this.

But what I want to suggest is that only Christianity offers the motor that can actually sustain and inspire the kind of heartfelt, radical compassion that the law demands.

And that motor isn't guilt and threats, we'll never be guilted or threatened into loving our neighbors. It's not hyper-vigilance, discipline, and hard work. We are far too weak and wicked to pull that off.

No, the motor that Christianity provides for us to love as God demands is the gospel.

[29 : 30] It's the gospel. I want you to notice here how Jesus ends his discussion with the law expert in verse 36. Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?

The expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, go and do likewise. Now remember, carefully, think carefully, and I remember the original question from the expert was, who is my neighbor?

Who do I have to love and who do I have to be responsible for? But look, Jesus doesn't ask the same thing. He doesn't ask, who is the Samaritan's neighbor? Who did the Samaritan have to care for?

No, he flips the roles and asks, who was a neighbor to the half-dead man? The law expert was asking, who do I have to help in order to have eternal life?

But Jesus asked, who would you want help from in your time of life-threatening need? He puts him in the place of the man on the road. You see, most of us, if we were trying to make a parable, trying to teach people to love their enemy neighbors, their Samaritan neighbors, we'd probably say, once upon a time, a Jewish man found a Samaritan lying half-dead on the road and he cared for him.

[30 : 36] Isn't that nice, Mr. Law expert? Go and do likewise. The needy Samaritan is your neighbor. But honestly, that'd just be a moralistic story that wouldn't have done a thing to this law expert's self-righteous heart.

Jesus knows this. He knows that in the law expert's mind, he is the hero in his own story. And he's trying to figure out how much of a hero he needs to be, what heroic deed he needs to do to check the boxes for eternal life and be his own hero to justify himself.

But by making the Samaritan the hero, when Jesus makes the Samaritan the hero, by making the Jewish man the one close to death and in need of a neighbor, Jesus is pointing us to the only thing that will actually transform selfish sinners like us into self-giving people of love like him.

By making the Samaritan the hero, Jesus' primary message isn't, hey guys, be nice, be a good Samaritan, okay? No. By making the Samaritan the hero and the Jewish person the one in need, Jesus' message to the law expert and to us is that we are the ones in need of a good Samaritan. We have to understand that first if we are ever going to be good Samaritans ourselves. We are the ones lying half dead, naked, helpless, penniless, completely at the mercy of someone whose compassion we don't deserve at all and who actually has every reason to forsake us and crush us because we all like sheep have gone astray down the wrong and treacherous road of violence and mayhem loving neither God nor our neighbors but only ourselves and things that are unworthy of our love.

[32 : 17] But the gospel says that in Jesus Christ God still sent us the neighbor we needed, the ultimate good Samaritan.

God became man. He became the neighbor who came near to our bloody mess to pour out his life and all his resources unto death on a cross to pay for our healing and our health to save and resurrect his undeserving people even when we were hostile to him.

And this is the gospel. This is the gospel. This is the motor we need to love as God requires of us. We cannot earn eternal life by loving super hard.

We cannot. It's only when we acknowledge that Christ is the ultimate good Samaritan, the neighbor we always needed. It's then and only then that we will ever begin to live this eternal life of self-giving love as branches growing from the vine that he is.

It's only when we acknowledge that we have the ultimate Samaritan who loved us at his greatest expense that we will be able to obey either of the two greatest commandments with the help of the Holy Spirit.

[33 : 30] We only love God because he first loved us. We only love our neighbors because he first loved us as our good Samaritan neighbor and he's given us his spirit to follow in his footsteps.

Our focus shouldn't be who is my neighbor that I have to love but how can I be a neighbor to whomever is in my path? How can I be like Jesus? If you've experienced the transformational neighbor love of Christ toward you that is the next question for you.

What holy habits of generosity and service will you take up in response to the good Samaritan who generously served you? What new and uncomfortable paths might you intentionally walk and come into closer proximity with just as Jesus came near to you?

Would you consider fostering a child? Supporting a foster family? I'd love to talk to you about that. There's a wonderful organization Foster the City in this area. Did you know that even if just half of the 700 churches in Alameda County had one new foster family all the rest of the foster children in Alameda County would be taken in?

There's also our Care Portal team that collaborates with local social workers to help families in need or families that are at risk of their kids being sent into the foster system. Join our Care Portal team.

[34 : 49] Or would you consider tutoring a child? The pandemic massively wrecked the reading aptitude of the children of Oakland. Harbor House and Children Rising are wonderful places that you might volunteer two hours every week to help a child learn to read and build those skills.

Maybe your next step is simply supporting your first, your second, your third, your fourth, maybe your fifth Compassion International Child. We're a compassion church. Or maybe it's volunteering on March 15th at Project Peace East Bay Day of Service or joining Abil and Jesus, our elders, and feeding and befriending our homeless neighbors in their loaves and fishes ministry.

The next one's on March 8th. This is coming Saturday. You'll learn more about all of this on our website under Church Life Serve With Us. But what's our next step? And this is a fitting season. What a fitting season, right? Ash Wednesday is this Wednesday. We hope that you'll show up to that. The beginning of Lent is upon us. And listen, it's not merely a season for self-denial and individualistic self-improvement.

The season of Lent is just as much a season for service and giving. So let's do it. Jesus said, go and do likewise.

[36 : 04] Let's do it, Christ Church. Let's be truly for the city as we say every week. And let's go in the name of Jesus to love and serve this world. Amen?

Will you pray with me? Lord, show us in Jesus Christ that we have not just the good Samaritan, but the best one, the ultimate one.

And help us to go and do likewise out of admiration and gratitude and compassion for this world. In your name we pray. Amen.
Amen.