

SERMON
By: Gail Fricker

Grounded in God, Part 3: God's World House

January 28, 2018

Luke 10:25-37

"And who is my neighbour?" - that's the question that the man asks Jesus.

"And who is my neighbor?"

In April of this year it will be 50 years since the death of civil rights activist, Martin Luther King. In an essay shortly before his death, King wrote:

We have inherited a large house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, cultures and interest, who, because we can never live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.

He went on to say that all inhabitants of the globe are now neighbors. He said that:

"all men are interdependent" and "all life is interrelated".

King wrote that in 1967 – but when I read that, I thought it was as relevant today as 50 years ago. King said that the "worldwide neighborhood" was a result of science and technology, quoting things like radio, television, and space travel – a technology which, he said, was enabling men and women around the world to demand a new and better future of equality. I wonder what he would make now of the Internet, Facebook, Twitter etc? The "worldwide neighborhood" has become both larger globally, but smaller with technology. Diana Butler Bass writes in her book, *Grounded*:

"In a very real way, we now see into almost every corner of the world house- sharing joys, fears, arguments, threats, and wonders with dizzying up-to-the-moment access and information."

The speed at which news now travels around the world is truly scary. But when we use that technology to look into the lives of our worldwide neighborhood, then we can begin to understand that the "other" is not a stranger, but a neighbour. We can begin to see ourselves expanded into broader and more inclusive communities of compassionate engagement. Or, at least, that was Martin Luther's King's dream.

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"And who is my neighbor?"

This week marked the year anniversary since the tragic mosque shooting in Quebec City. At the anniversary gathering, city lawyer Megda Belkacemi spoke up about the death of her father. After describing the awful night when she and her brothers searched the hospitals in vain, she went on to describe her father. She described him as a professor of agricultural engineering who channelled his insatiable curiosity into finding better ways to feed the world; as a jester who always had a joke up his sleeve; a gourmet chef who prepared festive dinners, like roast duck or quail; and a devoted family man whose wife, also a professor at Laval, was not only the love of his life but also his best friend and colleague. Megda told her story because, she said;

"it's only by seeing others as they really are, in all their humanity and complexity, that we can conquer hate" (She explains) - "Hate blinds us, so we don't see clearly anymore and we think that the other person is the enemy. When really, he or she is just a person

like you. They're a human being with faults and qualities, goals and achievements, with their own story."

Isn't that the message that Jesus is talking about when he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan? Jesus deliberately makes the key characters in his story a Jewish man and a Samaritan – two cultures that had a history of conflict with each other – two cultures that were blinded by hate.

In the wake of the tragic shooting, there was a clear increase in empathy towards Muslims; there were vows to combat hate; and vigils were held. But one year on, racism has reared its ugly head again with discussion about the wearing of the niqab. Megda said:

"This obsession with focusing on the religious clothing has really harmed our community because it really tends to highlight the differences, versus highlighting all the similarities and all the joint sentiments of community-building and wanting to participate equally in our societies."

Isn't that what Martin Luther King preached about 50 years ago? Isn't that what Jesus preached about 2000+ years ago?

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"And who is my neighbor?"

Today we celebrate Black History month. Yes, this is a time to celebrate the accomplishments of our black brothers and sisters; a time to celebrate African and Caribbean culture through vibrant music and song. But, for me, Black History month is also more than that. It is also a time to acknowledge the fight for equality and justice. Sometimes people who never contributed to Black oppression don't understand why they should have any responsibility for repairing it. Just like people whose ancestors chose to move to North America don't see why they should have to be involved in reparations to Indigenous nations. Or men who don't hold to misogynist behavior or views don't see why they should have to be part of women's movements. But the truth is that we are all recipients of the legacies of our ancestors. We did not begin with a clean slate. And all of us are part of a society that experiences racism in the education system, in hospitals, in beauty salons, in worship, in the job market. Sometimes it is a quieter, polite racism. But it is the background to our daily lives. And if we accept things the way they are, then we too are racist, sexist, and homophobic, just because we live in North America and these things are in the air we breathe. It is our responsibility as Christians to stand up and say what does it really mean to ***"Love your neighbor."*** Martin Luther King said:

"this call for worldwide fellowship lifts neighborly love beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation. It is a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men ... when I speak of love, I am speaking of that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life."

How do we as Christians show that love? Do we speak up when we hear a racist comment or joke? Do we speak out against the ever-increasing hate crimes? Because that is what Jesus commands us to do. To love our neighbor. A neighbor who may be as different as Jew and Samaritan. As different as Christian and Muslim. As different as Black and White.

Globalization and shared technologies are making our world neighborhood larger and larger. It is our call to make this world community one that is grounded in God; one that is filled with communion, compassion, and love.