

Neighbors (Luke 10:25-37)

“And who is my Neighbor” (v29)

Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan to answer the question, ‘who is my neighbor.’ It is a story that many of us heard told in various ways. In England I even did a street drama sketch of the parable: it was set on train with a bunch of football hooligans screaming “What a load of rubbish”, and then beating up a fellow traveller; the injured man was then ignored by a local vicar who sang “Amen””, and ignored by the social worker who “really cared about the kids, but was helped by the leader of the Punk Rocker band – ‘The Dregs!’ that stopped the train and sought medical assistance.

It’s a modern-day version of the same story that Jesus told, because when Jesus chose the Samaritan as the one who helped the robbed and beaten man – the Samaritan in Jesus’ time was the outsider – the Punk Rocker of society. The one that we would least expect to help others. And why did Jesus choose a Samaritan – it’s simple really – he wanted to push our comfort level of who we consider to be our neighbor!

It’s funny how this story can be so relevant still to today’s society. Who do we accept as our neighbor? I mean literally, how do we feel when someone who is different from us moves in next door? Do we greet the refugee, the immigrant, the homosexual to our neighbourhood, or do we worry about the effect it might have on the value of our house? Are the doors of our homes open to those who are different? How would you feel if your son or daughter wanted to marry someone

from a different culture or sexual persuasion? Are the doors of our own church open wide to those who come from different traditions than our own? Are we open to listening and learning and hearing the voice of God from others?

In the United Church, our Song of Faith reminds us that we as Christians are one strand in the Web of life. It calls us to grow in wisdom and compassion, and to recognize all kin. I will be the first one to admit that growing up in a white Christian home and neighborhood, I learned very little about other faiths. I didn't realize that Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and others faiths have very similar passages as the ones that we can read in our Christian Bible. I didn't realize that Judaism speaks of "the way"; Islam speaks of "surrender"; at the heart of the Buddhist path is "letting go"; and Taoism teaches we must "let ourselves be empty, to be reborn". All phrases that sound like they could come from our Christian Bible. But it is only through being open to listening and learning, that we can foster an understanding, and grow in love with our neighbors. That is why Jesus deliberately chose to use a Samaritan in the story.

Today, we have the Hejjo family with us. They come from a very different culture, eat different foods, and have different faith traditions from our own. But they are still our neighbors! But before we welcome them and learn a bit more about their life, I ask you to be open to hearing God speak to you in the following multi faith readings that remind us "*Who is my Neighbor.*"

(United Church of Canada – Song of Faith)

All creation is good. We sing of the Creator, who made all humans to live and move and have their being with God. We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life. We can grow in wisdom and compassion. We can recognize all people as kin.

(Hindu writing)

What sort of religion can it be without compassion? You need to show compassion to all living beings. Compassion is the root of all religious faiths.

(Buddhist writing)

“adopt the same attitude towards all beings; do not handle others with an uneven mind, but with a mind which is friendly, well-disposed, helpful, free from aversions avoiding harm and hurts; treat others as if they were a mother, father, son, or daughter.”

(Taoist writing)

He who can find no room for others lacks feeling, and to him who lacks feeling, all men are strangers.

Harmonize all voices with Heavenly Equality. Forget distinctions. Leap into the boundless possibilities and make it your home!

(Jainism writing)

Have benevolence towards all living beings, joy at the sight of the virtuous, compassion and sympathy for the afflicted, and tolerance towards the insolent and ill-behaved.

(Islamic writings)

All [human] creatures are God's children, and those dearest to God are those who treat His children kindly. ... The best thing in Islam, is to feed the hungry and to give the greeting of peace both to those one knows and to those one does not know.