

The Art of Neighboring Part 2

Luke 10:38-42

Pastor Tom
April 17, 2016

Which is more important – in growing a garden – sunshine or rain? Which is more important in applying for a job – your resume or your answers in the interview? Which is more important when preparing to play a sport – practice or nutrition? Or in raising a child – compassion or discipline? Or in considering a car to buy – The way it looks or the way it works? Which is more important in the Christian life? – Sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to his teaching or serving and loving others?

Which is more important:

In growing a garden – sunshine or rain – BOTH.

In applying for a job – resume or answers – BOTH.

In playing a sport – practice or nutrition – BOTH.

Raising a child – compassion or discipline – BOTH.

Buying a car – its looks or its engine – BOTH.

The Christian life – Sitting at Jesus’ feet or serving and loving others – Sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to his teaching. What? Aren’t both equally important? Aren’t we called to both Love God and Love People? It doesn’t do refugees or orphans or impoverished people much good to know Christians in St. Albert are reading their Bibles. We’ve got to get out there and help people. Yes.

I’m not saying that loving neighbours and serving others is unimportant. It’s a key piece to living out the Gospel in the world around us. But there is something more important or perhaps more accurately of first importance when it comes to our Christian lives. Today, we are going to see this in a very short episode of Jesus’ life. We’re going to see Jesus teach this surprising principle and then see how we live it out especially when considering our neighbours around us. I especially like you to take note of where this incident is placed in the Gospel that we’re looking at.

We continue the good neighbor services today. Our instruction will come from Luke 10 in your Bibles or on your devices. If you don’t have a Bible, you can follow along with the ones right in front of you. The text we’re reading is found on p. 733 of that Bible starting at the bottom of the left column where you see the little number 25.

Luke 10:25-42 (ESV)

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ And he answered, "You shall 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 your neighbour as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Last week we briefly talked about the world famous parable of the Good Samaritan. If there was ever a case for emphasizing doing or serving as more important than or at least as important as listening to God's Word, this is it. Jesus skillfully makes the parable more memorable by his choice for the travelers who come upon the wounded man. A priest held one of the most respected offices in the nation. They were God's shepherds among the people. But the priest in this story walks by the man in need. Likewise, the Levite helped with duties pertaining to the temple. He was too busy to stop. But a hated Samaritan stops and helps. Jesus concludes by asking the lawyer "who was the neighbour" in the story. The lawyer answer "the one who showed him mercy." Jesus responds, "go and do likewise."

So when we enter the Martha and Mary account, it seems like the Martha will serve as a shining example of someone who loves and serves their neighbour. After all, she does welcome at least 13 people into her house for dinner. How would you respond if you suddenly had 13 adult houseguests for dinner and overnight? We might grab all the sleeping bags we have and find some space for them all to sleep. Then we'd call out for 6 extra-large pizzas to help feed the masses.

Yet Martha had none of that. They didn't have pizza delivery or even freezers. She needed to prepare a meal from scratch. Maybe that involved baking bread and slaughtering an animal and then preparing it for consumption. Her act of receiving Jesus and the disciples into her home was very generous and significant. That culture placed great value on hospitality. In an honor and shame system, if word got around that you did something honorable like showing good hospitality to visitors, others would honor you. But if word got out that you had hosted someone and done a poor job, everyone would shame you. They feared that your poor hosting would bring a bad name to the village or region. So Martha takes on no small task and is under a lot of pressure.

She has a sister Mary we think was younger. What is little sister Mary doing while Martha busies herself with hosting Jesus and the disciples? She sits at Jesus' feet and listens to his teaching. Now there are a few social problems with this. One, women were not really supposed to spend a lot of time sitting and listening to teaching. That was for boys and men who would go to school with the rabbi. But women were supposed to be concerned about children and the home fires. Yet, Jesus does not rebuke her for sitting and listening. Second, she settles in a very public and prominent place. If she's sitting directly at Jesus' feet, she's closest to the teacher. It might have been okay for her to stand at the sidelines or against the wall of the house. But to sit directly beneath the teacher was unusual. Third, she does not help her sister prepare the meal. It might have been okay for Mary to listen for a minute or two. But more important for women, especially in that culture at that time was ensuring that the meal was well prepared and hosted. Yet she just stays at Jesus' feet listening.

Now Martha is busy with all the preparations. Bread baking. Meat roasting. Table set. Flowers arranged. Bread nearly done. Meat nearly roasted. Vegetables chopped. Drinks ready to pour. Little sister helping. Everyone's feet washed. Enough place settings for everyone. Little sister helping – Little sister nowhere to be seen in the kitchen. Where is little sister? Bread needs to come out of the oven. Meat needs carving. Drinks need pouring. Vegetables need stirring. Those ones feet haven't been washed. Little sister just sitting there completely clueless about everything needing to be done.

Martha's frustration boils over. Luke declares "But Martha was distracted with much serving." What was the number one priority in Martha's eyes at that moment? Serving – which is a good thing in itself. And yet, Luke describes her as distracted with much serving. Could it be that putting serving first can lead to some undesirable results?

We don't know if Martha tried to give Mary the evil eye. We just know that Mary continued to sit while Martha continued to stew. So Martha's decides it's time to act. After all, the greatest priority is serving this meal. So she confronts not Mary but the Lord with wrongdoing. She doesn't do this privately after everyone is fed and feels better. She confronts Him publicly. I wonder if she interrupted his teaching because she felt that this was so important. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?" Then I love the next phrase. "Tell her to help me." Yes Martha, let's just go and tell God what He needs to do to make the situation right.

I love that phrase because we can so easily slip into this ourselves. We can fly around doing all the things we think need to get done. Then when some obstacle gets in our way, we tell God what He needs to do to ensure we get done what we want to do.

Jesus responds like only Jesus could. He shows compassion for Martha and appreciation for her hosting. "Martha, Martha – It's like he's communicating his appreciation to her by repeating her name. Yet, he has a mild rebuke for her. "You are anxious and troubled about many things." "But she's just trying to serve. She's doing the good work. She's doing something! Mary is just sitting there. Yes, maybe Martha is getting a little too stressed about the preparations. But she's doing the most important thing right now." Or is she?

"You are anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken from her." End of story! Wouldn't you like to know what happened next? Did Mary stick out her tongue at Martha? Did Martha just retreat to the kitchen in anger? Did she stop all her fussing, serve what was ready while she took a seat herself? We don't know. But Jesus teaches that Mary has chosen the good portion. It seems a little contrary to us. We're supposed to serve like the Lord served. But serving without listening to Christ can lead to anxiousness, a troubled heart and distraction.

Mary's good portion brings to mind the Old Testament passages that talk about the greatest possession being close fellowship with the Lord. Psalm 16:5 – The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. Psalm 27:4 – One thing I ask of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. 73:26 – My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 119:57 – The Lord is my portion; I promise to keep your words. 142:5 – I

cry to you, O Lord; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.” Though Martha prepared the meal, the main course was Jesus’ and His teaching.

One commentator points out that both Martha and Mary showed hospitality to Jesus. Martha offered hospitality to the messenger. But Mary received both the messenger and his message. That’s what Martha missed at that moment. The parable of the Good Samaritan provides a powerful comment on the person-to-person dimensions of God’s requirement of love to others. This account reminds us that time with Jesus and our relationship with God must come first. So how has your time with Jesus been going lately? Have you been investing time in God’s word and responding to what He reveals in prayer?

Spending time with Jesus in Bible intake, meditation and prayer is more than just ticking off something from our “to do list.” He can give us strength, encouragement, hope, and power to live. Sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to Him gives counsel and strength for work, unemployment, retirement, manager/employee relationships; marriage; home relationships; parenting; internal struggles; walking through illness and the death of a loved one; perseverance; patience; character and priorities. And we gain power, strength and resolve to pay the price to love our neighbors.

Because Jesus is the source of that power, we must come to Him first. We may know the command to Love our neighbors. But there are so many distractions in our lives that can keep us from it. And our own sinful hearts can raise up multiple excuses to avoid giving up anything for people we hardly know.

John Newton – author of *Amazing Grace*, former captain of a slave ship and then a pastor for 40 year - talks of how the Christian life flows from our connection to Jesus and Our need to continually thirst for fresh communication for the Fountain of Life (Christ Himself). Jesus is the heart of the Christian life. The hidden life of a Christian, Newton says is “a continual dependence on him for supplies of wisdom, strength and comfort.” Then the Christian life flows from hourly communion with Christ because “the more you know him, the better you will love him; the more you love him, the better you will serve him.

And the better we serve our neighbors from a heart filled by God. So we pray for our neighbors. We ask God to work in their hearts. We ask for opportunities to connect with them and for God to open doors for us. Then we make ourselves available to them. Last week, I asked those of you in attendance to list the 8 closest neighbours to the place where you live. Some of you could list all of them. Others could list at least 5. Some of us had work to do in getting to

know our neighbours names. I have to do more work in getting to know our neighbour's names. This past week, I was thinking about this when walking the dog in the morning. I noticed one of our newer neighbours in their garage just as I was about to go back into our house. Instead, I just lingered for a minute and then said "Good Morning." The lady with her daughter responded back with a greeting and then we briefly chatted about living in the neighbourhood. The next morning, when I was out walking, she drove by with her daughter and gave a brief wave. It can be that simple in starting to know your neighbours. If you weren't here last week, I encourage you to go to the info center and get one of the neighbourhood cards where you can fill in the names of your neighbours as you learn them. But we not only want to know our neighbour's name. We want to connect with them to serve and love them as Christ has commanded. We hope for an opportunity to influence them for Christ.

So we are asking you to think about and commit to doing at least one intentional connection with your neighbours this spring or summer. One way you can do this is by hosting a block party. There are resources available from the city of St. Albert to help you with this. There might other Christians in your neighbourhood from other churches that you can work with. We will have a table in the foyer after the service where you can learn more about how to go about doing this. You can even attend a block party book camp that is coming up early in May.

But we also recognize that hosting a block party is not for everyone. Maybe the thought of hosting or helping with a block party terrifies you or turns you off. You're introverted. You like meeting people one on one or in a small group. That's okay. Be a neighbor in that form. Connect in the way God has created you to be. God does not command everyone to be an extrovert. He commands us to love our neighbours. So as you are in your skin, ask Him for wisdom on how you can further live this out. Many ideas on insert.

2 actions this week:

- 1) Pray and Ask God to open your eyes to where His' already working or your street or in your building.
- 2) Will you spend 1 hour this week outside in your front yard or common areas just for the purpose of meeting people or making a connection?

Friends, as we celebrate 40 years of ministry this week, God's mission for us in this community is not over. There are thousands of people that need Christ in St. Albert. Some of them live right beside you. I pray that God will continue to use us as individuals, families and a church family to bring God's good news to them.

Prayer:

- 1) Think of your street, acreage, building, or hallway,
 - a. Ask God to open your eyes to where He's at work.
 - b. Pray for your neighbors now – Ask God for opportunities to get to know them. Ask God to reach them.