

## Our DNA

### We Serve Our Neighbors

Luke 10:25-37

June 26, 2022

Pastor Mark Toone

Twelve of us just flew back from Detroit where we held our annual General Assembly. I *wish* you could have been there! Our own Pastor Julie preached the opening convocation, the first ever woman EPC pastor to preach in person. Our own Rosemary Lukens was elected unanimously to be the first-ever woman moderator, introduced by our own elder Scott Griffin. In fact, because of a technicality...they voted twice to elect her. And *twice* unanimously! And our own Pastor Rachel led the Assembly in prayer. I know...part of our DNA is "We embrace humility". But I confess, my buttons were popping! I was proud of our church and our people. You would have been, too!

*And...another bonus...our flights weren't canceled! So, I get to preach this morning! I'm glad because we are wrapping up the series on "Our DNA"; nine qualities that make Chapel Hill distinctive. These are so integral to who we are, that I'd encourage you to go online and listen to any you might have missed. This morning, we come to the last of the nine markers that define us as a church: We serve our neighbors. Our text, Luke 10.*

*And behold, a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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 neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." Luke 10:25-28*

It was a trap, which is a shame. It was a great question. But the guy wasn't *really* trying to learn something from the greatest teacher ever. He was trying to trap Jesus; to force him to say something that might trip him up.

But Jesus is an Aikido master. He flips the question right back on the questioner. "What do *you* think? How do you read the law?" It's like the perfect Alpha table leader! And the lawyer answers well. "Love God with everything you have...and love your neighbor as yourself." "Good job," Jesus said. "Do this...and you will live."

Too bad he couldn't leave well enough alone. But *now*...the lawyer feels like he's being tested. Jesus has turned the tables. And we know that by what comes next: *"But [the lawyer], desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

He's on the defensive now. "Love God *and* love your neighbor" ...was the correct answer. But look at his follow-on question. He doesn't ask what it means to love God well. He was confident in that department. Fundamentalists always think they have the "love God" part down pat.

But it was the other one...the neighbor-love...that made him nervous. He didn't want to know if he was doing enough. He wanted to know how *little* he could do and still skate by. He didn't say, "Tell me what it means to love my neighbor well." He said, "Ok...if I *have* to love my neighbor...then who *is* my neighbor? Who, exactly, do I have to be nice to in order to check all the boxes?" It is a cynical question from a spiritually cocky person. And frankly, it is the sort of spiritually arrogant isolationism that COVID has stripped bare and revealed, even in some parts of our own Gig Harbor church community.

Jesus' response...his most famous parable...actually answers two questions: who is my neighbor...and what does neighbor-love look like?

*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. Now by chance, a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 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. 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.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37*

We've all seen those horrifying videos of attacks on innocent people in broad daylight. The inhumanity of the attacks is bad enough. But equally disturbing is this: how can you stand there with your phone in hand, recording...instead of shouting or intervening, or at least using that phone to call the police instead of making your next viral video? The capacity to ignore human suffering is disgusting; it was just as disgusting in Jesus' time.

This poor man, probably Jewish, is attacked, beaten, stripped, robbed, and left for dead. A Senior Pastor of a big church comes by and, when he sees this guy, moves around him and keeps going. An Associate Pastor of a big church comes along and does the same. What a disappointment that these religious leaders could be so indifferent to such obvious human suffering. But it is the Samaritan who is the unlikely hero. Samaritans and Jews were like the Hatfields and McCoys; they despised each other and had feuded for hundreds of years. But *this* Samaritan stops, ministers to, transports and pays for the care of a Jewish guy he'd never met; someone who was a religious and cultural enemy. He gets nothing out of the deal. Not even a thank you.

In this brilliant parable, Jesus teaches two things. Who the neighbor is...and what it means to love that neighbor. The neighbor is anyone near you...especially anyone in need. And the love Jesus is talking about...agape, in the Greek... has nothing to do with feelings and emotions...and everything to do with compassion and action. The Samaritan loves his neighbor...by having compassion on...and serving his neighbor.

The apostle John once wrote, "Anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." In other words, one of the ways we demonstrate the genuineness of our love of God...is the way we love those around us. Our neighbors. Whoever...whatever they might be. It is often inconvenient, time-consuming, expensive...and thankless. *And...we do it anyway.* Because that's the way God loved us.

One of the dangers of being a large, well-resourced church...is self-absorption. We have a great mission, and wonderful programs to accomplish that mission led by gifted staff and faithful volunteers. We invite outsiders...often unbelievers in Jesus...to *become* part of our church family, because we think we have something valuable to share.

All these things are true of us. But the danger comes when we are so focused on what's going on within these walls...that we forget or neglect those outside these walls. Those who are *not* yet part of us. Those who may *never* be part of us. The chapel on the hill...which ought to be a beacon of hope and care for all...too easily becomes a fortress on a hill, barricaded against the culture, protective, paranoid, defensive.

If you're big enough, wealthy enough, arrogant enough, you might pull it off. There are many churches with a fortress mentality. But that is not who we are. And I pray Chapel Hill will never be that kind of church. We care about good theology, about living godly lives, and about impacting our communities for Christ. But we have never been so sure of ourselves...so self-sufficient...that we

shut ourselves off from our community. We embrace our community...we are for our city...and the last of our DNA values speaks to that: We serve our neighbors. We have always served our neighbors. We have always loved our neighbors. It's who we are. Who we've always been.

Thirty years ago, our worship services were bursting at the seams and we needed a larger sanctuary. But because there was *no* place in town for kids to play, we decided to build the gym first. Every Sunday we set up 600 squeaky chairs, a stage, risers, choir shell, rolled out a piano and organ-and then tore it all down. Every week. A huge hassle, but worth it for the sake of kids and families. We built our gym to serve our neighbors.

When we *did* build this building, we built it to share. There was no place for community concerts, plays, baccalaureates, or civic funerals. We became that community auditorium. We built this sanctuary to serve our neighbors. When we built our Gathering Place, there was *no large* community space for meals or conferences. So...we built the GP with that in mind. Available to community groups, our school district, and civic organizations. We built our Gathering Place to serve our neighbors.

-The County asked us to be an emergency shelter. We said yes...and donated \$50,000 to install the mother of all generators so that, whatever the emergency, there would be heat and light for those gathered here. To serve our neighbors....

-Our Titus ministry is the largest provider of emergency resources in our community. You have given approximately \$1.5 million over the years, mostly to those who never darken the doors of our church. To serve our neighbors. That's our history!

But in some ways, that's small potatoes. Then came "Beyond These Walls." We had \$5 million of debt costing us \$600,000 annually. We longed to be free of that burden...but decided that when we were...instead of keeping those dollars, we would give them away. Every year...\$600,000 goes "beyond these walls" to serve those in our community and region and world. That was the plan.

Question was...who would give to such a campaign? There wouldn't be a fancy new building at the end; no ribbon-cutting ceremony. You'd receive *nothing* personally for your generosity. We had no idea how you'd respond. But...boy did you respond! The most successful capital campaign ever. In the end, you paid off that \$5 million in debt of mortgage burning and freed up those

resources to give away...as we had never done before. To serve our neighbors.

Last year was the first full year of BTW. You provided \$150,000 to help build a new FISH food bank, the first of a quarter million-dollar pledge. You provided \$25,000 for a van to transport Afghan refugees. You gave \$25,000 to sponsor our local Habitat for Humanity house, a down payment on a \$75,000 pledge. You gave \$25,000 to a multi-cultural church in Seattle to hire a pastor and another \$25,000 to fund the first African American executive in our denomination, an incredible leader. And perhaps the *most* exciting of our BTW initiatives...is Kitsap House in Port Orchard, our first church plant. Planting a new church is about as beyond these walls as you can get. And with Kitsap House on the verge of financial independence, we have set aside \$100,000 to invest in our *next* church plant...and have started the interview process for it.

Those are big-ticket examples, of course. But through BTW, you also funded Member Empowerment Grants! Like Spiritual venture capital. Seed money to allow *you* to serve your neighbors with *your* great ideas. One group raised \$4,000 for CareNet. We celebrate the reversal of Roe v. Wade...but now more than ever, need to care for young mamas and the babies they choose to keep. Another group used \$5,000 to support Tacoma Street Ministries. A family used \$1,000 to fill backpacks for 350 kids. And another group used \$2,500 to sponsor a fun run which raised \$25,000 to provide clean water to a village.

These are just samples of how...through your generosity...you have been serving your neighbors. In total, last year, in addition to the 10% we have always given to missions, we gave away an extra 15%...\$500,000...and put another \$100,000 in reserve so we can respond to unexpected needs. And we intend to do this every ...single...year...forever...because "serving our neighbors" is in our blood.

Jesus once said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Our treasure ...our building programs...our benevolence and our mission giving, reflect an outwardly turned heart; a heart of love and concern for our neighbors. Would we be thrilled if they were drawn into our church because of that kindness? Of course. But we give ourselves away without expectation of anything in return. We serve our community and our region and our world because we believe it's what Jesus would do...and because he told us to love our neighbors. And my dream is this: that the raging pagan on the street, the guy who would never set foot in our doors, would say, "I don't believe a thing Chapel Hill believes in...but I would hate to see them gone. They are great for our community!"

It's good to talk about what we're doing as a church to serve our neighbors. If you are supporting us financially, you're already part of that work. (By the way, the last five months have been tough, income-wise. Anything extra you can do to help before the end of this month will be timely...and greatly appreciated.) Thank you for your generosity!

But I *hope* what we are and do as a church family... trickles down to every family and member. Because you...and you...and you...and you...are called to serve *your* neighbor, too. Your *real*, literal neighbors. The ones who live near you and work in the next cubicle and sit in your classroom.

It has always been easier for me to be a corporate neighbor rather than a personal one. In the past, I was a hermit. When I got home from work, I pulled up the drawbridge and hid. I was done for the day. But Cyndi and I became convicted of this and, when we moved into our new neighborhood, we committed to love and serve our neighbors better. Honestly, for an introvert like me, this is challenging. But it has been a blessing. We co-hosted an open house. We helped lead an Easter parade during COVID. I cut down a beloved shrub to give my neighbor a better view. We installed a new mailbox for an old lady. We've offered to be vacation plant waterers for our neighbor, and two weeks ago I prayed in the middle of the street with a neighbor who was taking his first few steps after having suffered a stroke.

I'm not saying any of this to brag; frankly, I'm making up for too many decades of lousy neighboring. I'm saying it to confess that I needed to be more creative and intentional about how to serve *our* neighbors...as Jesus told me to! It's personal...not just corporate. It's about *me*...not just the church. Maybe you can relate.

This is our BTW brochure. I hope you'll pick one up and devour it. There's so much here to celebrate. I hope it will prompt your continued generosity. And I hope it will prompt *you* to make it personal. Join in building "Chapel Hill House," the first Habitat for Humanity build on this side of the bridge in over 10 years. Or stir up your Lifegroup to apply for an empowerment grant for YOUR vision. Or connect with a local agency. Or do your part to protect and care for the unborn and unplanned. "Love the Lord 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. Serve your neighbor! Do this...and you will live!"