

**[Global Enemies]** Most everyone has heard that Jesus says we have to love our enemies. In a recent Gallop poll, 83% of Americans think we have an enemy. No matter who we vote/voted for and however much we agree or disagree on how to deal with enemies, we do all agree that when we see terrorist attacks like that of Brussels, Paris, or Orlando, that we do have enemies. If I were to ask you who your enemy is you might say this nation or that. You might say it is the establishment, the government, or economics. You might even say it is ISIS or another terrorist organization. When I tell you the christian goal is to “love your enemies” we have to ask ourselves how can I love ISIS? How do I love Kim Jong Un?

I am not discrediting ISIS or any terrorist organization and I am not saying that they are not our enemies, but in our day-to-day interactions, the vast majority of us don't have to contend with ISIS or Kim Jong Un Sometimes those enemies seem so impossible, so far away, even sometimes immovable. Let's look a little closer to home in our own back yards per say....

**[Bad Neighbor]** Does anyone in here have a bad neighbor? The neighbor that doesn't mow their lawn in a timely fashion or they don't treat the lawn so you get weeds in your lawn because of them. How about the neighbor that shares a fence with you, but they don't water or maintain their side of the fence so you have to constantly repair it. Some of you are that neighbor. How about at work? That one person that always takes the credit for the project they never helped with. What about that person that just knows everything about your job and never stops telling you how to do it or you just can't get along with them.

For most of us, 'loving our enemies' begins a lot closer to home. What I want all of us to see today is that we all have a real life enemy we wrestle with every day. The real enemy is our neighbor, or our co worker. The person at work or school when you see them coming you run the other way, that is your enemy. The person that you can't stand to be around or makes your life miserable, that is your enemy. That bad neighbor we talked about, that is your enemy. When I said bad neighbor or bad co worker someone came to mind for you, that is your enemy.

**[How to picture this?]** According to Jesus, how well you love that person, is how well you love God. You can measure your love for God in terms of how well you treat the person you love the least.

Wait, Wait, Wait a minute, I don't like that I have a problem with that. I can have a relationship with God and not my enemies. I can love God even though I don't have a relationship with them. I can just avoid them at work and when I see them I can be cordial and polite. I can just wave at my neighbor and not say all the things I want to say to them. I can just continue to keep my head down and ignore the ones that really get on my nerves and be as nice as I can. I can use my energies and talents to gift back to those I love. The people who deserve it.

Jesus didn't say that though did he? He didn't say keep our head down he often challenged the tough questions like this with another way a new way. It isn't just about stopping war or playing nice with others. God wants us to be whole, it is about shaping our whole selves into people who love fully, justly and rightly. A way to flourish.....

[Scripture Slide 1] Turn with me today to Luke 10. We're in a series called [w]hole. We're asking what a whole, healthy human life looks like. To find the answer, we're beginning with Jesus' response to a question he was asked. Throughout this series, we've been looking at Jesus' answer in Mark 12. But today, I want to look at another time Jesus was asked this question:

One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?"

We hear "eternal life" and automatically think of "going to Heaven" when we die. But for Jewish people, eternal life was a way of talking about life with God, the life we were created to live. Eternal life doesn't start after death. It starts *now*. The man was asking how he could be a good son, how he could live as God's child now.

Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" The man answered, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!"

We are to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength. During this series, we've have been using the lens of self examination. We learned how our heart feeds our desires, we don't have to be afraid of our desires, whether enjoying physical or spiritual pleasures learning how to train them and direct them is the art of what living part of a whole human life looks like. How our soul and our energy helps us to draw boundaries to be our whole selves. We learned how to love God with our minds, that our perspective matters, that how we think and see things matters. When we looked at how to love God with all our strength we learned how to use our power and privilege, a lot or a little, how we use it matters. Not how much do we have, but how we use what we have. Using Jesus' replies to understand how we're going to use these four aspects of our humanity heart, soul, mind, and strength as a lens to examine our own lives.

Let's look at our lives through the lens of how we treat our neighbors. Which raises the question Who is my neighbor?...

In the version of the story we're reading today, the expert in law pushes the question further. The text reads that "seeking to justify his actions," that's an interesting way to begin the story isn't it? I wonder what actions of our we attempt to justify by asking who our neighbor is that we're suppose to love with our whole hearts? Before we read the story that Jesus tells, though, let me give you a small bit of background on the Samaritans as the Jews' neighbors.

Who is the Samaritan to the Jews? The Jews viewed the Samaritan as an enemy. They clashed in politics and religion. The Samaritans believed that they had the right answer, the right way to practice it, and the only way and the Jews thought the same way. We don't know anyone like that today do we? We have the nation split with protests and outrage claiming not my

president or Hillary Clinton. We have gone from disagreeing to literally destroying our country. The reality is we are all neighbors, but just like the Jews and Samaritans, we all live next to each other. We're all geographical neighbors. So as we read the story, think of the Samaritan as THEM let's pick back up in the story.

The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

"By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.' "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same." -- Luke 10:25-37

How are you showing mercy? Where are you giving grace?

[Neighbors] Jesus' brought the man to the answer through his parable. The man asked how do we receive eternal life and the man said by being a neighbor and specifically Jesus said, your neighbor, is a person who needs mercy, regardless of whether they are your enemy or not. Jesus told him to go and do likewise to receive eternal life. We must show mercy, we must be a neighbor to live a whole life, to flourish. The "bad neighbor" we talked about earlier, how do we make them a friend?

This can make us uncomfortable, we want to push back, we want to say "wait a minute I can be a good christian without being a good neighbor. I am helping in my community to make it better. I work well with my coworkers to get our workload accomplished. I try to be nice, kind, and caring. I give of my time, money, and experience to help others.

Here in this answer to the expert in the law Jesus tells us that to not love our neighbors as ourselves is to refuse to live as God created us to live. Did the Samaritan "just get along"? Did he "tolerate"? No. He went out of his way, at great expense to himself, to ensure his needy neighbor flourished. Hating other people literally puts us at odds with God's creative purpose in the world. When we hate other people, we are anti-christ and far from being whole.

Let's look at scripture again:

Romans is Paul's letter speaking to a church that is ethnically divided. Not between Jews and Samaritans, but Jews and Gentiles. Romans and Jews, who were neighbors and enemies, but now a church. He reminds them of what God did while we were still enemies of God.

For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. -- Romans 5:10

According to Paul we can live together as neighbors, good neighbors not enemies. Because while we were still enemies God made us into friends. Even while the Samaritan was enemies with the Jew he cared for him. For us maybe it sounds more like even when we were Democrats and republicans we showed mercy, we loved, we acted like a neighbor. God's work superseeds our national identity, our ethnic identity, and or political identity.

Perhaps the most explicit version of this comes in Jesus' sermon on the mount in Matthew 5. Jesus is here helping people understand the wholeness of salvation, that it isn't just about the sweet by and by, the eternal hereafter. Rather, it's about bringing God's eternal goodness into the here and now....

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. -- Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus said by loving our enemies, by praying for those who pester, victimize, or oppress us we are like our father in heaven. Jesus tells us that our neighbor includes our enemies and those who persecute us. He said if we don't do this we are no different, nothing sets us apart from the rest of the world.

[Good Neighbor picture again] Now we can practice loving our neighbors not starting with ISIS and North Korea, but with the people we encounter on a day to day basis. I am not saying that you can't be a Christian at all. I am echoing what we have learned throughout this whole series. We are all sinful. We are all God's children. And Jesus invites us, with the power of the Spirit, to examine ourselves for the seeds of sin, to use these lenses of heart, soul, mind, strength and neighbor to rid ourselves of hatred, cruelty, and suspicion. If we will commit to doing this difficult work, Jesus promises we will live as God's children, whole.

Each of the lenses we have explored so far can be turned toward our neighbors as well as toward God. We can love our neighbor as ourself with our hearts by discerning the root of our desires, breathing deeply in the spirit, and then leading us through towards life with our neighbors and God. We can love our neighbors with our souls by drawing helpful boundaries that enable us to never be drained or run on empty. That allow us to pour our souls into our

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neighbors and live vibrant, powerful, world changing relationships and sometimes saying no to our neighbors is the most loving and healthy thing we can do. Using our minds we can learn to see our neighbors as God sees them, see what matters, and inject peace into our neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities. Using our strength we can seek justice for our neighbors, work towards peace, and self control. Today we can add onto this with a lens of practicing all this while being a good neighbor and ensuring our desires for our neighbors are holy and chaste..

We all have room to grow and it is okay to not be perfect just yet. What matters is not that we are perfect, but that we are growing. That we are taking seriously the call toward a whole, holy life. That we are learning how we can apply this to our neighborhoods, jobs, or communities.

[Pic?] When I first moved to my neighborhood in Fate I didn't really know any of my neighbors. We would come and look at the house being built and our neighbors would scatter. No one came and talked to us or tried to meet us. Several times we tried to stop and talk, but were limited to a hello or a simple nod. We spent so much time and effort trying to love our neighbors. Even the ones with the annoying dogs, even the neighbor who didn't take care of their fence or help me pay to repair it, even the neighbor that called the cops when our dog barked at 6pm. We made baskets, invited others over, went to neighborhood functions and tried to fit in the community. We never gave up, we didn't stop inviting, we didn't stop going to talk to them. Fast forward to today where we regularly block off our entire cul de sac, barbeque together, do fish fries, and watch the fireworks in our front yards. I can honestly tell you I thought my life was better off without my neighbors I was so tired of trying and getting nowhere. Now though I can tell you my life is so much better with my neighbors, with my friends. My friends that were once enemies, that were once distant, but now working together to make our neighborhood a better place for everyone. Inviting others to be a part of our community.

If you are recognizing that this is an opportunity for you to grow, if you are recognizing that you have a Samaritan in your life a neighbor that needs our love. I want to invite you like me to take the steps to grow to practice loving your neighbor as it makes you whole.

This brings us back to the question then, how do we inherit a whole, full life, that can flourish?

Love God with all your heart. With all your soul. With all your mind and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. To be a good neighbor, you give mercy. (pause between neighbor and mercy)

### **Communion + Examen**

[Communion Slide] We approach the Lord's Table today because this is the space where God made us friends. God prepared a place at this table for you while you were God's enemy, when you were hopelessly lost, and mercy was your only hope.

This meal invites us back to the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night before he was killed, when he broke bread as his body, broken for us by us. When he passed to us a cup of

wine as his blood, poured out as a new covenant between us and God. Between God and God's enemies - a covenant that transformed enemies into children.

We approach the table today to receive God's mercy, to be transformed into peacemakers. We leave a people committed to transforming our enemies into friends and neighbors.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion. If you're willing to receive God's mercy, and then show mercy to others in response, you're welcome to come to the Table.

Before we approach the Table, I will lead you in a Prayer of Examen. I'll ask you four questions, and give you space to reflect prayerfully on each question. Then, I'll pray for all of us and as you're ready, you can approach the table.

When in the last week did I love my enemy in a tangible, practical way??

When in the last week did I show hatred toward my enemies?

When in the next week will I be tempted to show hatred toward my enemy?

How can I love my neighbor (who is my enemy) as myself in this next week?

### **Prayer**

God,

You loved us while we were your enemies. While we ignored you, despised you, mocked you and went our own way, you died for us. You made peace with us. You declared us your friends.

We live in a world that is deeply divided - not just globally but at home. We see enemies all around us. We live in fear.

Teach us to be your people, your faithful children who make friends where others see only enemies. Who show mercy to all who need it, regardless of race, creed, color, sex or politics.

We need the power of your Spirit and so we approach your table today, this table where you offered your body and blood even to Judas, who was preparing to betray you to those who crucified you. Knowing that, you still washed his feet and served him this meal.

As we come today, may these wafers and juice become a Spiritual food. May we leave your table today having received your peace, and may we return to our world as peacemakers.

We offer these prayers and approach your table in the name of your son, Jesus.

### **Blessing**

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Catalyst as we go out to our Jobs, neighbors, and communities this week may we be good neighbors that show mercy, grace, and love. Go in the grace and in peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We will see you next week.

**Commented [1]:** Use the Trinitarian blessing formula. Always Trinity, whenever you can.