
All Our Neighbors

**A sermon by the Rev. Deacon Juan Sandoval
Proper 10 – Year C**

Last Monday, I along with our clergy, blessed a mass of humanity running by the Cathedral. It was the annual Peachtree Road Race. We blessed the young, the old, the in between. We blessed runners of all colors, shapes, and sizes. Runners of many different beliefs. Runners with one common goal, to finish the race. Yes, over 50,000 runners with one common goal.

During the race, some very young children were there with their parents. They were so cute and mostly unaware of the runners coming by. They played, especially with the water, but also with their imaginations. Perhaps they knew each other from church, but that didn't matter as they just enjoyed each other. Yes, they too had one common goal, to be with each other and to have fun.

This reminded me that as a young child, my mother and I would walk down 1st avenue and greet our friends and neighbors. It seemed like we knew them all. I particularly remember our neighbors at the end of the street. They were an African American couple, he was The Reverend Smith, a Baptist pastor, and his wife, well she was Mrs. Smith. They were so friendly and kind to me. Some of you may remember having milk delivered to your home in glass bottles and the plug was printed so to look like play money. This couple would save these for me, and I so enjoyed receiving them. Now if you crossed the street, there was what might be called a precursor to the convenience store. It was Sing's store, a neighborhood store with so many things. Mr. Sing spoke perfect Spanish which was interesting since he was Chinese. It just seemed like everyone knew everyone and everyone cared about everyone. Neighbors! Just neighbors who cared for each other!

In Matthew 19:14, Jesus says to his disciples, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." I perceive this to mean that the little children are pure of heart and innocent and have not yet established a schema of denouncing others for whatever reason. These little children love others for no other reason than just love. As adults, we have formed our own ideas, our own discriminations and lack of love for some of God's people.

Today, the lawyer asks Jesus, "who is my neighbor?" To which Jesus replies with the parable of the Good Samaritan. An amazing parable and one that guides us in how to treat our neighbors. Chapter 19 of Leviticus provides a long list of laws of justice and mercy, but verses 33-34 relate to the Gospel. "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. ³⁴ The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

We have all been strangers somewhere in our lives. During the Vietnam war, we received a North Vietnamese soldier who was badly wounded. I'm sure he was quite frightened, being on the other side and wasn't sure what to expect. We treated him surgically and provided post-surgical care as we would for any military person coming through our facility. The symbol for the medical community is the caduceus and represents healing and caring for humanity. It does not mean we can pick and choose whom we treat. It signifies to treat to the best of our ability and to do no harm. If you look at one of our beautiful stained-glass windows you will see one with the caduceus along with acts of caring.

The late 1960s were a time of turmoil. The Vietnam War was in full throttle, there were angry protests on college campuses. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated, setting off a string of race riots in American

cities. The land of the free was deeply polarized and at the crux of the division was the question of racial equality. The Civil Rights Acts was passed in 1964, but discrimination of our African American neighbors continued. One area of this discrimination was that of public swimming pools, even though illegal, some communities tried to keep the races separated.

In 1969, Fred Rogers, a Presbyterian minister and children's show host provided a show about treating our neighbors. It was not a loud and outrageous act, but it was simple and caring. Francois Clemmons, a Black actor playing a police officer, and Fred Rogers dipped their feet together in a wading pool on an episode of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood". Officer Clemmons initially declined because he didn't have a towel, but Mister Rogers said, "no problem, you can share mine." After Officer Clemmons had used it, Mister Rogers took the towel back and dried his own feet.

Won't you be my neighbor

Today's society across the world is in need of transformation, in need of change. We are inundated with war, gun violence, senseless mass killings and words of hate. If society were a patient in a hospital and had a heart rhythm that is problematic or life threatening, I would say we need to defibrillate the patient. Defibrillation is not a jump start, but a shock that stops the heart momentarily and allows it to reset to a normal rhythm using electrical energy measured in joules. An atrial dysrhythmia requires less energy to reset to normal or a ventricular dysrhythmia which is life threatening and requires more and immediate energy to reset it. Regardless, the source of reset is the same. Like the heart, society has a dysrhythmia, a *social and spiritual* dysrhythmia and society needs to be defibrillated in a way that will reset society to act in a more civilized, moral, and loving manner. Instead of joules how about if we reset with a jolt of RAK, AOL, or ACATs? Random acts of kindness, acts of love and acts of caring and tenderness. We must move from fear, hatred and violence to kindness, love, and justice. We must love our neighbors, all our neighbors as Jesus taught in today's parable.

In our daily offices and at Eucharist we often pray of Confession of Sin, and we use this phrase, "*we have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves, we are truly sorry and we humbly repent.*" I pray that these words are meaningful and move to loving all our neighbors. In our Prayers of the People, we pray for all people in their daily life and work, and we respond, "*For our families, friends and neighbors and those who are alone.*" I pray that we remember all our neighbors, and name them in our prayers.

Our sequence hymn, verse 2, sums up well about loving our neighbor:

Join hands disciples of the faith, whate'er your race may be! Who serves the Father as his child is surely kin to me

Our one common goal: To Love One another as we love ourselves.

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

AMEN.