

May 3, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt 3. Luke 10:25-37

Dear Friends;

Once upon a time this message was simply the Sunday Sermon for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Stirling, Ontario. In the era of Covid-19, a world wide plague it has morphed (never thought I would use that word) into something else. I begin by sharing with you some of the things I have done this past week while self-isolating. I ran out of both yeast and flour. Many of you know I bake home made bread from scratch the way my mother did when I was a child. Through our local Bulk Barn I was able to buy a bag of flour that will last me a long time. A girl in Sunday School years ago, in a church far far away, as a woman and an accomplished chef, Mary Berg, taught me how to make my own bread starter. I have not used it yet. It is maturing well, and this could be the week I try it out! Last week we stopped pumping water out of the basement at the farmhouse. So on Tuesday our plumber came and the farmhouse is now officially open. I can say I have mastered self-isolating at two different places in the same week. We are well. And I continue to pray that these messages will find you also able to say, that you are well. Wash the hands. Self-isolate. Use hand sanitizer. And may God richly bless you. You are keeping the faith, and running the good race, or you would not be reading this and imagining what it will be like to gather together as a faith family in the sanctuary, you call Home.

This week I am turning once again to the parable of the Good Samaritan. I am amazed (which is what happens

when the Spirit of God opens your eyes) to how relevant the Scriptures are in a time of world wide plague, a disease with no vaccine to cure us of it. In Luke chapter 10 the story of the Good Samaritan was not where the conversation began. It began with a clergyman, (a priest who was an expert in the Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament) trying to test Jesus. The conversation began in the field of theology. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Apparently the expert suspected Jesus did not know HIS Bible as well as someone who graduated from the right "schools." The tables turned as Jesus answered with a question which was a forehand smash back into the experts court. "What is written in the Law?" The translation of that question into English is, what does the Bible say? 2-0 for Jesus.

The professor answered, "Love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and, love your neighbour as yourself." Jesus awarded the teacher praise for a correct answer. In fact Jesus added the assurance which we must not take lightly, "Do this and you will live." I often wonder because I do not know, if this was the source of NIKE's creed, "Just do it." The point of Jesus response to the teacher was it is not enough to know the right answer, it is about putting the pedal to the metal. As a bumper sticker declares "Git 'er done!" Doing the love God with heart and soul and strength and mind and loving your neighbour as your self is the secret of new life through faith in Jesus. Every time I bake bread, I arrive at a point where I have messy, sticky dough all over my hands and anything I

touch, and I think I am never going to do this yicky thing again! (Except I love bread and butter, or bread and honey, or... I am sure you get the point. I have to do it to get bread. You have to do it to be the person you want to be in God's sight.

And we are witnesses to this reality. You may have noticed by now this series is not necessarily about being an evangelist. It is about the fact that we see stuff all the time which holds up the teaching of the Scriptures, reinforcing God's presence and HIS love before us in real places, in real time.

The conversation between Jesus and the teacher of the Law (an expert) turned to real life quickly. How different the lesson would be if the expert had held his tongue in check. He was eager to corner Jesus. He thought he saw the board, the pieces, the move that would allow him to do a kill shot and cry checkmate! "Ah...and who is my neighbour?"

Whether it is the Prime Minister, the Premier of Ontario, or the host of medical experts from Public Health, they have all been singing from the same hymn book since this pandemic took hold in Canada and around the world. Why do we self isolate? I am sure there are some that will quickly answer to keep myself from catching the virus. Does not the Doctor end her report on Ontario's state in the pandemic with those words "stay safe"? There is a degree to which self isolation, and staying the length of a hockey stick from everyone else, and wearing a mask when you go shopping or into your bank (as I slipped my mask into place to do just that a man in the line behind me said, "Are you really going to go in

there like that?") mostly these measures are all about protecting someone else: the teller, the lady or gent at the till, the girl who opened the door for me and took me to the flour bin, and scooped and bagged for me, and wheeled it and led me to the cashier.

This is a dreadful thing to say. Love took the lives of those who have passed away from Covid-19 in the seniors homes across this country and the continent. Friends and relatives bore it to their loved ones. Committed care givers bore it from room to room and home to home. Wanting to help and love close up, instead of distancing, has proved fatal to thousands. And hear me....I am not trying to judge anyone, but with this plague, this lethal virus, keeping a distance, saves lives.

Your neighbours may never notice the full affect of what you are doing by being at home and staying there as much as you can. I emphasize that when Barb and I were going up to the farmhouse to pump water out of the basement it was a door to door exercise. Each time there came a moment when the pump stopped pumping and we were down to a muddy earthen floor. Our choice was simple. Barbara was the one who would remind me of the choice. "So, are we going to stay and listen to the Prime Minister, or head back to 24 Sherwood in Belleville." Most times we stayed to hear the Prime Minister. We were by ourselves in the living room with our jackets on. We did it for neighbours we do not know, and have never really met. You are loving your neighbours if you wear a mask, if you

keep your distance, if you are home and stay there. We are witnessing the majority of Canadians caring for Canadians they do not know well, and for family a distance away. We see it every time the report is that there is a reduction in the number of cases...the flattening of the curve on the graph. We self isolate for ourselves but not just for ourselves. The only way to beat this disease is to take these extraordinary measures which require that we think about our neighbours.

I almost cheered out loud when Premier Ford lost it and expressed what he was feeling about the protest at Queen's Park to end the measures, and open things up, so that someone could get a hair cut! You are doing something that is the difference between life and death for others, every moment you stay home. You are not offering yourself as a piece in the game by which this virus spreads. Every moment you spent away from the herd, someone is receiving the chance to continue to be disease free: one of your neighbours, one of your friends, a relative whom you hold dear and want to be with.

Who is my neighbour? The one I choose not to bring risk of fatal illness to. And I remember my English teacher in Grade XI, reminding us you do not end a sentence with a preposition. But sometimes breaking the rule makes the point most clearly. I say again, in a time of deathly plague, we are not only participants in the strategy, but witnesses to what others are doing to minimize the number of cases of illness and the number of cases of death.

The parable that Jesus shared with that Teacher of the Law, was about someone who was assaulted and robbed on the Jericho Road. For whatever reasons the victim was travelling a dangerous piece of territory and even worse, travelling alone. "Man alone, is easy prey." (Clint Eastwood in the movie Pale Rider) One person self isolating is not the answer in a time of an outbreak of disease with no vaccine in sight. It takes all of us, the majority of us, most of us, caring about our neighbours and their well being for this to work. And again, I say, we are witnesses. We are seeing it go down. As opportunities are given to relieve the isolation we are witnesses of the effectiveness of this ancient remedy to terrible outbreaks of disease. Caring for God and self and neighbour works. It works. You can see it working, and terribly you can see it not working where measures and care have not been taken.

Jesus asked the Teacher of the Law, "Which of the three was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The reply of the Teacher of the Law was, "The one who had mercy on him." The one who paid the price of caring for the man who was in danger of death." Be sure of this! In spite of the unprecedented measures taken by governments there will be workers at the end of this who will not have a job to go back to. There will be business owners who have lost their shirts trying to stay viable, and will no longer be able to sell or employ. We will witness what doing the right thing can cost. Caring always comes at a price. Doing the right thing

always has a very personal cost. And governmental measures are and always will be, imperfect.

Jesus last word to the Teacher of the Law was right and honest and practical. This is not theoretical stuff. HE said what amounted to, 'You want eternal life? Go and do what that Samaritan did. Care. Be an instrument of mercy in a world where people are dying. We have had the privilege of not only participating...but we have been witnesses. We have seen it unfold, and believe me, we are also in the picture.

Let us pray;

Lord there are days that seem dreadfully long. And there have been days when what we have been doing, staying home, washing our hands, using hand sanitizers and wearing masks, has not seemed to change anything. They tell us, this first wave is beginning to end. Help us to stay the course. Help us to think of those who are more vulnerable than we are. Help us to remember how this plague swept around the world in a world where people travel and live in close proximity. Bless those who go toward the danger and fight for lives on the front lines of this conflict. Make us mindful of your love and grace and peace when we are tempted to say "There is no peace!" Grant us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Give us tender caring hearts and help us to remember...what we have witnessed when it is over. Amen