

# Neighboring

2019, Hannah Scanlon  
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In her last sermon as a Pleasantville Presbyterian Church Associate, Hannah Scanlon asks us to think about what this "neighboring" thing is all about. To Hannah, it's simple, "Get your hands dirty and live out the love of God by interrupting your own schedule to address the naked need right in front of you." "May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light." --Colossians 1:11-12 (Originally Preached on Sunday, July 14, 2019 at Pleasantville Presbyterian Church)

## Colossians 1: 1-14

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=430122802>

[0:06] A reading from Colossians 1, 11 to 14. Paul, an apostle of Christ, Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother,  
to God's holy people in Colossae the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ,  
Grace and peace to you from God, our father.

We always thank God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all of God's people, the faith in love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel, that has come to you in the same way the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world.

Just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

[1:05] You learned it from **Epaphras** our dear fellow servant who was a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and to also told us of your love in the spirit.

For this reason since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through the wisdom and understanding that the spirit gives so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way,

bearing fruit and every good work and growing in the knowledge of God being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might.

So that you may have great endurance and patience and giving joyful thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of Light.

For he is rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

Please pray with me.

[2:24] Dear God, May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing as a gift to you.  
Your holy name. Amen.

## "Neighboring"

[2:43] The story of the Good Samaritan is one we know well, it's the poster boy of morality stories.

Hospitals, charities, nursing homes, religious organizations are named after him, in the US We even have a law that states that any modern day good Samaritan who stops to help a stranger along the road will enjoy certain legal protections for her trouble.

We find the story in Luke. It's first told by Jesus to a curious young lawyer, and it goes like this.

A man is walking down the road from one city to another, Jerusalem to Jericho, and he gets attacked by a band of robbers.

They beat him, strip him and leave him to die.

A short time later, a priest comes down the road and seeing the wounded man passes by him on the other side.

A short time after that, a Levite, also a priest, a Jewish priest, comes down the road and also passes by the wounded man.

But then a Samaritan comes along and seeing the wounded man lying there feels pity.

[4:06] He feels pity, and he goes out of his way and draws near the man.

He cleanses his wounds and bandaged him up he puts him on his own animal, carries him to the nearest inn and pays the innkeeper for his further care.

At the end of the story, Jesus turns to his lawyer friend and asks which of the three was a neighbor to the wounded man, the one who showed him mercy.

The lawyer answers.

The lawyer has clearly landed on the correct answer. So Jesus answers. Go and do likewise. Do this and you will live.

[4:52] The moral of the story is clear. Go out of your way, extend kindness, help someone in need.

Get your hands dirty and live out the love of God by interrupting your own schedule to address the naked need right in front of you.

God's kingdom Work is all about going into the ditch and sitting in the ditch and being with the people who have found themselves in the ditch.

Go and do likewise. Jesus says.

[5:31] Okay, so at this point, we could go on our way and be satisfied with the fact that we've given this passage of fair interpretation.

But as followers of Jesus, we also know that our God is a God who challenges us to grow, to

be more like him.

Once we think we've mastered operable or teaching such as this one, it's always wise of us to look at it again and see where God might be inviting us to grow in our knowledge of him, ourselves and our world.

So let's delve a little bit deeper into this story.

We might do this by looking at the players in our drama.

First, we have the Jews, Jesus and the young lawyer to whom he's telling the story, or both Jews.

And since it's this story is in Jewish scripture, it's presumed that the Jews are the target audience of the story as well.

[6:30] Within the story, the Levite and the priest who passed by the wounded man are both Jews.

Interestingly, the ethnic identity of the wounded man is not mentioned. But let's assume for now that he too is a Jew.

Then we have the single Samaritan who does the heroic deed.

[6:54] It's best to remember that during the time of Jesus, Jews and Samaritans were groups of people who hated each other viciously, a family grudge dating back hundreds of years. It's one that we still find reflected in our modern politics between the Israelites and the Palestinians.

Because of their respective family ties, both believe themselves to be the inheritors of God's promises to Moses and Abraham, and both see themselves as legitimate inheritors of the land, even in the practice of their common religion. The two groups disagreed about everything that mattered.

Writer Debbie Thomas reminds us how to honor God, how to interpret the scriptures and where to worship, practicing in separate temples, reading different versions of the Torah and avoiding social contact whenever possible.

These two groups of people hated each other.

[8:01] So we can understand that when Jesus asked the Jews to see the Samaritan as the good guy in the story, it would have come as a shock.

It was a big ask. He was prompting them to put their cultural and ethnic biases aside, ones that were deeply entrenched in their family history.

He was challenging them and us to put on hold, the prejudices we nurse, and to see the human side of those people were so determined to put into predetermined categories.

Surely you and I could think of some modern day examples of some groups of people we would prefer to keep in theoretical boxes. Such as these,

**Bigoted**, ignorant, cold, lazy, uncaring.

It's sometimes hard to see the human and others, but this is God's very real challenge on this journey of faith.

[9:13] Okay, So at this point, we might ask ourselves if we can now be satisfied with our interpretation of the story,

that, in addition to helping others, God asks us to help others, even if the person in the ditch is someone who is different from us in every sense of the word.

That's an important interpretation of this story. But again, let's look a little deeper.

Let's take note from the curious young lawyer who isn't satisfied with knowing that he must love his neighbour, but also wants to know the answer to who is my neighbor.

And to do this, it might be helpful to bring our attention to the perspective.

We've been taking the eyes. We've been viewing this story through the shoes that we've been standing in.

[10:14] It's most natural to look through the eyes of the Good Samaritan.

After all, Jesus tells the lawyer, too. Go and do likewise using the Samaritan as the example.

If we were to take the perspective of the Good Samaritan, the question we would ask ourselves as readers would be the one that we've been asking already.

Who are those people in my life in my community that would challenge me to put aside my personal prejudices to help.

This is clearly a necessary perspective.

[11:00] But what if we saw through three through the eyes of the Levite or the priest?

In moments of honest reflection and self awareness, we might also see ourselves sympathizing with the Levite and the priest who passed by on the other side of the road.

There are times when we're too overwhelmed with our own problems and our own messes, that we'd simply don't have enough emotional strength or energy to muster up the kindness needed to help those people whose values or lifestyle or belief systems are so very different than our own.

It's sometimes good to own our own limitations.

It's sometimes good to confess to God and to one another that there are periods of life when that ditch just seems too deep for us.

[12:01] But what if this morning we're curious about what it would be like to look through the eyes of the wounded man.

[12:12] Maybe the space that we need to occupy first is not above the ditch, but in it.

Remember that the wounded man is the one person in the story who isn't marked by a religion or an ethnicity or race.

He's a man going from one point to another.

[12:39] He has no identity at all, except naked need.

[12:49] What if, in order to feel the impact of the Samaritans compassion, we need to be the one reaching up to grasp its hand?

Perhaps we need to understand what it feels like to receive the scandalous grace of God.

A grace made scandalous because it comes to us in the form of a helping hand. We hoped we would never have any reason to touch.

[13:20] We've all been on the broken road at one point or another, And when we are when we're in a place where we are grateful to grasp any glimmer of grace,

it isn't those differences that matter,  
when you're lying broken in a ditch. It's not about who's help you most prefer.  
It's not about the politics and policies you agree with the brand of Christianity you practice or  
the ideologies that craft your identity.  
It's about that startling face of compassion that peers down at you at the very moment you  
thought you were about to die.

[14:08] What is this neighboring thing all about? The young lawyer wants to know from Jesus.  
Sometimes neighboring has to do with our willingness to be overcome with God's grace,  
to have our entrenched ideas up ended and the boxes we put people into broken open by the  
fresh face of Jesus.

[14:40] Your neighbor is the one who helps you re teach the meaning of good.

[14:49] What do we do to inherit eternal life? What is this kingdom living all about?  
Do this. Do this and you will live.  
Amen.