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Mark 12:28-31; Romans 13: 8-10

Who is My Neighbor?

In the poem "Mending Wall," Robert Frost famously says, "Good fences make good neighbors." While there might be some truth to that statement, there is so much more to being a "Good Neighbor" than just having a "Good Fence."

Scripture tells us a couple of things about being a neighbor, who is our neighbor and how we should treat our neighbors.

Our first reading is Mark 12: 28-31

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he (Jesus) answered them well he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

That's pretty clear, or so it would seem. Love your God, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. In the Message, it says, *Love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.* A little different interpretation. **AND love your NEIGHBOR as YOURSELF!**

As **yourself**, and there-in lies the first issue. LOVE YOURSELF! God loves you, others love you, **so love yourself**. That is not always the case, and for some that is a challenge. I do not want to focus on this aspect, but I feel it needs to be mentioned. September was Suicide prevention month; and October is Depression Awareness Month. One could easily do a full 20 minutes on this, but I will leave it here, God wants us to "Love ourselves!" **And we can help each other do that.**

Our second reading from the New Testament this morning is Romans 13: 8-10

Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

So, **"Love Your Neighbor."** What does that mean? And **what does that look like?** AND who is Your Neighbor?

Identifying Who is your Neighbor might help with figuring out what loving your neighbor means or looks like.

A few minutes ago, we greeted each other, we greeted our fellow church members, our church family, our PCO neighbors. So, what does this neighborly love look like?

Well, we worship together, we spend time together, we pray together and for each other. When one is sick or in need, we respond. We not only pray, we send a card, we call, we visit, we fix a meal, we offer a ride. We reach out and help in any way we can. We care about each other, and for each

other. That is one of the great things about this church. And even in death, we care for each other. This fall we will be celebrating the lives of two of our members, Ellen Briggs and John Cumbow.

Who else are our neighbors? Our actual neighbors, those people who live around us, the house next door, across the street, around the corner or down the street. I think we would all agree on this.

But do we really love all these neighbors? The one with the political signs we do not support, the one who does not cut their grass when they should, the loud one, or the one with the loud car or dog? Do we even know them?

When I was growing up, we knew all the people on our block, and beyond, sometimes knowing more than we should have. That is not always the case today.

So, **what does it mean to love these neighbors?** I think it should be much the same as here at PCO. Pray for them, care for them, cut their grass if that is something they cannot do, shovel some snow for them, share some food, **talk to them**. In many cases we do not even talk to our neighbors.

In the book **"In the Neighborhood"** by Peter Lovenheim, after a neighborhood tragedy the author decides he needs to get to know his neighbors. He goes door to door, introducing himself and asking if he can do a **"Sleep Over."** Yeah, a sleep over.

And some people say yes! And, yes, most say no, but maybe dinner, or just a visit some evening. He gets to know his neighbors and helps them connect with each other. He connects some of the kids with the neighbors who need help with their grass. He connects one who recently lost their job with one who does career counseling. His hope is that if there is ever again someone suffering from depression with suicidal thoughts, they might "reach out to a neighbor," or one of their neighbors might recognize that something is wrong and seek help for them.

When I started working for Lyman Briggs College at MSU, many years ago now, one of the professors brought me a paper one of his students had written. He did not know what, but something in the paper disturbed him. So, he reached out. Sure enough, the student was depressed and was having suicidal thoughts. The professor was a good neighbor, as well as a good prof.

So, is that it, does that cover it?

Ah, NO, NO, NO!!!!!!

Who else is our neighbor, beyond PCO and our neighborhoods who live around us?

Well, I think you know where we are going next - **Our Community**, the larger Lansing community! And again, this is something PCO does a really good job with. We show our love for our neighbors, we regularly serve meals at Loaves & Fishes and Advent House. When there was an apartment building fire a couple of years ago, we helped. We participate in the Greater Lansing CROP Walk, and **there IS still time to sign up!**

We fill the shopping cart in fellowship hall. We will soon be collecting for Thanksgiving baskets, then the Christmas Tree of Caring, the Alternative Christmas and so much more. Edgewood Village, GIL, the Davies Project, Community in Schools-MI. Last Sunday we welcomed some of our **MSU neighbors** by welcoming UKirk students. Yesterday several members spent the day at Cass Community on Detroit.

And no, our neighbors are not just fellow Michiganians. Our neighbors are all over this country, and we have a long record of helping various organizations and after natural disasters, often through Presbyterian Disaster Relief efforts.

And no, we do not stop there, our neighbors go beyond our country borders, to all corners of our planet, to a school for girls in Kenya, a nursing college in Haiti, an orphanage in Matamoros, Mexico, a peace park in Nicaragua, and more.

As Jimmy Carter said, “Whether the borders that divide us are picket fences or national boundaries, we are all neighbors in a global community.”

So, who is **your** neighbor? People from the other side of the world, people from all around our country and state. The neighbor you will see when you drive home, and the one you might not see. The people in the pew in front of you and behind you.

And the person you see in the mirror every morning, love them all!

And now you thought I was done, right, well almost. In today’s world I would be remiss if I did not say a little more about who our neighbors are, about who we are to love. Love, not tolerate. Love, not look the other way when we see them. Love, not Hate!

What I am talking about now are those who are ‘different’ than us. From the statement at the top of your morning bulletin,

“people of all ages, ability, gender identity, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation”

And more, the immigrant, the refugee, the homeless, the hungry, those who speak with an accent or different language, the person wearing a hoodie, the person with a strange looking tattoo, the person of a different religion, or no religion, the estranged family member you no longer talk to, the driver who cut you off, and, and, and..

I will close by going back to “The First Nations Version” of Mark 12: 31-33.

“The second instruction is like the first, he added, “You must love your fellow human beings in the same way you love yourself. There is no other instruction greater than these.”

“Wisdomkeeper,” said the scroll keeper with a smile, “you have answered well and spoken the truth, for the Great Spirit is one and there is none other except him, To love him with your whole being – with the strength of your arms, the thoughts of your mind, and the courage of your heart, and to love your fellow human beings in the same way you love yourselves – is far greater than all ceremonies and offerings we make in the Great Spirit.”

Let us pray