

Summer Worship (Communion)  
"Like a Good Neighbor"  
By Rev. James Ramsey

Texts: Amos 7:1-17  
Luke 10:25-37

Preached: 7/10/16



State Farm Commercial:

Two friends are sitting in a car, enjoying take-out sandwiches. The guy in the passenger seat wears a telling baseball cap -- it's yellow, with a picture of a buffalo on the front.

--Then, all of a sudden the car starts rocking back and forth from multiple impacts.

The camera backs up and you see the car parked on a lonely road with a herd of buffalo around it and one repeatedly smashing the driver's side door. The guys panic.



- The passenger has an idea...he says to the driver...ah, your agent, your agent...do the jingle, do the jingle!



--The driver says in a hysteric way -- "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there."

- Ping --  
a State Farm agent in coat and tie magically appears in the back seat, big smile on his face, unaware of his client's predicament. He greets them, "Hey Guys." They turn around and scream.

-- Then he quickly grasps the scene -- they're in trouble -- lots of aggressive buffaloes!

- Do it again, do it again, he counsels.

-- The driver hurriedly repeats the jingle: "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there." The agent puts his arms around the two guys, hugging them, and says, "in my office."

- Of course, the three of magically teleport to a peaceful State Farm office...and the two guys celebrate with a fist bump.

-- The commercial closes with an announcer calmly saying, "State Farm agents are there when you need them."

...like good neighbors.

If only good neighbors were so easy to come by...





Imagine being able to conjure up help when you find yourself in a scary situation! Wouldn't the world be a great place if there was a good neighbor at your beck and call? What if there was a good neighbor right around the corner?

The main character in Jesus' parable should have had State Farm. He found himself in a bad way – very bad. He lay beaten, stripped and abandoned on a most notorious road.

Jesus said the man was left half-dead. He desperately needed a neighbor. He must have gone through every jingle he knew, pleading with God and anyone else who might listen – please... help! It didn't take too long until his prayers were answered. Here comes a priest, of all people, you would think the best neighbor you could hope for. But his joyful relief is short-lived.



Just as quickly as the priest appears, he vanishes, crossing the road to pass the wounded man on the far side. It must have been a bitter pill. But all is not lost. The priest had gone, but wonder of wonders, here comes another fellow – this time a Levite. Surely this man of God's law would understand that it was his duty, at the very least, to help a wounded kinsman.

Yet, no help is forthcoming. This neighbor is no neighbor at all, passing by just like the priest before him.

It's rotten to get beat up by thugs – to be wronged by strangers – it's worse to be ignored by your own people.



As if things were not bad enough – yet another person comes strolling down this God-forsaken road – and this time it is the last person the wounded man would want to see – a Samaritan. He would have been immediately recognizable. He was the quintessential “other” – a foreigner, different religion, dressed in Samaritan clothes...he probably smelled like a Samaritan! For us it would be like stumbling on a Black man in a dark alley – or an Arab Muslim wearing a turban – looking very much like a terrorist! Not good.



But this Samaritan was good, even though he shouldn't have been...couldn't have been. When this Samaritan, saw the wounded man, against all expectations and probabilities, he was moved with pity. He crossed the road and he helped. He didn't just help, he bandaged wounds, he poured oil and wine, he gave up his own steed, he carried him to an inn, he took care of him, he paid for his lodging...he gave the innkeeper a blank check, for crying out loud!



Jesus asks, "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The answer is plain as day, isn't it? The one who showed him mercy.

Jesus says one more thing – "Go and do likewise."

In other words – BE LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR! Be the answer to someone's jingle! You don't have to magically appear when someone calls either...you need only open your eyes and help the wounded ones along the way.

There are wounded people along nearly any road you might take – and I'm not talking literally, necessarily!

Jesus needs more of us, more often, to act "like a good neighbor."

Amazing, humbling, convicting... that we focus on this text at this time. Who is my neighbor?



It's been a startling, troubling, frightening week in our country.

The New York Times described it this way:

*First came the cellphone video of an African-American man being fatally shot by a Louisiana police officer, and the astonishing live feed of a Minnesota woman narrating the police killing of her African-American boyfriend during a traffic stop. Then came the horrific live television coverage of police officers being gunned down by a sniper at a march protesting the police shootings.*

*And suddenly, the panoply of fears and resentments that have made this a foreboding summer had been brought into sharp relief.*

Even before this week, when I was in Portland at our denomination's General Assembly, there was much discussion, prayer and concern over the recent night-club shooting in Orlando, FL.

From Ferguson, Missouri to Newtown, Connecticut to Charleston, SC and many other cities and locales around our country there is serious talk of "gun violence as a social issue and national shame." (NY Times)

In the hours after the Dallas ambush, stunned officials and civic leaders pleaded for citizens to repair the rips in the nation's social fabric.

Dallas police chief, David O. Brown, who is African-American, addressed the media -- “We are heartbroken. There are no words to describe the atrocity that occurred to our city. All I know is that this must stop, this divisiveness between our police and our citizens.”

The Rev. Bryan Carter echoed him at a Friday memorial service for the fallen officers, saying: “We refuse to hate each other. We commit to pray together.”



Perhaps it was Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch who best captured the day’s mood. She said on Friday, “This has been a week of profound grief and heartbreaking loss. After the events of this week, Americans across our country are feeling a sense of helplessness, of uncertainty and of fear.”

“We must reject the easy impulses of bitterness and rancor,” she added, “and embrace the difficult work — but the important work, the vital work — of finding a path forward together.”



Look at the Samaritan – even though he’s just a character in a parable. He found a path forward. He crossed the road, to be LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR. He showed mercy in abundance. He loved with his hands and his feet and his pocketbook. Jesus says, “Go and do likewise.”