

“Who IS MY neighbor?” Rev. Jane Courtright July 14, 2019

Let's take time this morning to remember and to be thankful
for people who have been 'neighbors' to US!

You may wish to close your eyes as you focus on these special
people....

*Picture clearly in your mind a person, who in your youth,
helped you grow spiritually...walked with you along that
journey.

THANK GOD FOR THAT PERSON!

*Think of someone who has warmly welcomed you into church,
either today or another day.

THANK GOD FOR THAT PERSON!

*Picture in your mind's eye someone who acted as your
neighbor

by bringing you a meal when you were sick or sad or hungry.

THANK GOD FOR THAT PERSON!

*Remember the face of a person who helped you
move into a new home.

THANK GOD FOR THAT PERSON!

*Think of someone who took care of your children or your ailing partner

so that you could have a much needed night out,
or just some time to yourself to recharge your batteries.

THANK GOD FOR THAT PERSON!

*Make a picture in your mind the eyes of a person

who listens to you even when you are feeling very low,
who you can count on to hear you whine,
who provides a shelter for you to cry on.

THANK GOD FOR THAT PERSON!

WHICH OF THESE IS YOUR NEIGHBOR?

“The one who showed you mercy . Go & do likewise!”

It’s pretty clear to us that these compassionate people
who surround us, live among us, **are** our neighbors.

Just like the lawyer in our Gospel reading this morning,

We understand, know almost by heart, the commandment to:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your
soul,

and with all your strength and with all your mind;

AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

And we do our best to follow that commandment.

Still, sometimes we also wonder, “Just who is my neighbor?”

In other words, “Who IS NOT my neighbor?”

Give us a break God – we have to love THOSE people?!

We’d like to measure out our love

....choose the people we should have to love.

Those Samaritans, people from Samaria, were foreigners, people disdained by the Jewish people for religious, ethnic or ‘racial’ reasons

& that hatred went back a LONG way in time!

Besides all that, this Samaritan was just passing through...

He didn’t live with them....he wasn’t ONE of THEM!

We read and hear, every day,

about wars that mess up & end so many lives.

Jesus says, weeping,

“If you could only recognize that things that **make** for peace.

But now they are hidden from your eyes.”

During each war,

there are individual human stories that touch and teach us.

The story I’ll share with you happened during ‘Desert Storm.’

The U.S. and allies believed that they came out on the winning side

of a tense battle with the Iraqis, led by Saddam Hussein.

Finally, Desert Storm came to an ‘official’ end,

after months of waiting & only a few short days of actual fighting.

IT WAS TIME TO TAKE STOCK.

For the Americans, the most grievous task

was to count the dead and notify loved ones back home.

Each unit had to account for all of its personnel:

- * Who was alive?
- *Who had been killed?
- *Who was missing in action?

Private Benny Blades was one of those who was listing

As missing in action in his unit.

There was no body to prove his death.

No one could remember seeing him wounded.

His disappearance was a mystery!

Mystery turned into miracle one day about a week

After the fighting had ended.

Benny was picked up along the road

By some soldiers returning from the front.

The women and men in Benny's unit were overjoyed at his return!

That very night, they had a big welcome home part for Benny.

EVERYBODY wanted to hear his story:

"What happened? How did you survive?

What happened to your legs?"

So, Benny told his story. He'd been wounded by Iraqi fire...

took several bullets in his legs.

Unable to move, he could only lie on the field of battle
and hope that someone would rescue him.

On the second day, he WAS rescued – by an Iraqi soldier.
groans and laughter followed these last words of Benny.

What a great joke, they said.....

or maybe Benny's wounds had affected his **head** also?!

“NO,” Benny said, “I talked to the soldier myself! His name was
Ahmad.

He said he could see me lying on the battlefield from his
outpost.

What's more, he saw two of OUR jeeps pass fairly close
to where I was WITHOUT stopping to help.”

It was discovered later that what Ahmed had seen

Were a chaplain and a medic.

The chaplain slowed his jeep as he came by and saw a soldier
lying there.

He was jittery in the area, however.

And besides, he had to hold worship services back at the base
soon.

He just didn't have time to stop. And, a medic would be by soon.

The other jeep that Ahmad had seen WAS driven by a medic.

That medic had been called north for a serious emergency.

Oh, he did spot a soldier lying in the field.

But this was just ONE wounded soldier – he was on his way to treat MANY.

And so, the medic, too, left Benny lying there.

Benny continued his story:

Ahmad said that when he saw our jeeps pass me by,

he thought he'd better do *something* himself.

He came to me in his vehicle, tended to my wounds,

then drove me behind their lines to a medical unit.

He ordered the medics there to look after my legs.

They did a good job. Ahmad came around to check on me.

ISN'T THAT SOMETHING?

Who would have ever *believed*

there was a *good* Iraqi soldier out there who would save **me**?"

“He’s a real hero to me, I tell you.

Without his help, I might be dead!

I will always remember Ahmad in my heart.”

There was a stunned silence among Benny’s comrades

As he finished his story.

Finally, Terry Slawson spoke up,

And he spoke for just about everybody in the room.

“Sorry, Benny,” Terry said, “But I don’t believe a word of it.

I really don’t.

There is just no such thing as a GOOD Iraqi soldier.”

At these words, the other soldiers cheered, feeling relieved.

PAUSE

Just a few minutes ago, each of us pictured in our minds

the faces of those persons who had acted as neighbors to us.

I’m sure that Benny Blades kept in his mind and heart

the face of Ahmad as one who was a neighbor to him.

Jesus asks US, “Which of these three, do YOU think,
was a neighbor to this man?

Like the lawyer, our answer has to be,
“The one who showed him mercy.”

Let US go and do likewise!

Jesus’ kind of agape love gives a meaning to everything we do.
It calls us to care for others, consider them as ourselves.

This Good Samaritan story is not just about

‘paying it forward,’ or random acts of kindness....
though they show agape love as well.

This story is about tending for ‘the other’,

the stranger, foreigner, the immigrant, those not just like
us.

Blessed are we and blessed are all those whom we encounter,

when we can see our selves and Jesus in their eyes. Amen!