

Sermon 1 November 2015 'Neighbour's, got to like them!'
Psalm 146 Mark 12:28-34

Prayer: Lord, our God, May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our rock and redeemer. Amen.

“What is the most important commandment?” Jesus replied that living was all about relationships. Get your relationships aligned – in order – straightened up **AND** God is where you start. We do not start with ourselves, as counter-culture as this is, we **start** with **God**. Some say this is the only commandment we have, all the rest are only guidelines, or rules etc. The **only commandment** we have from Jesus is to love – God and neighbour as self. Commanded to LOVE, can we?

Can we be commanded to love? Unfortunately – yes. **We** are here because we have already decided to follow Jesus, one way or another. We have given Jesus that authority in our lives, scary right? But we come because we are learning that when we follow him our lives are better; our souls are fed; our spirits lightened, **through** the presence of his Spirit in / with us.

So when the wise church leader asked Jesus “What is the most important commandment?” Jesus replied that living was all about relationships of love. Love God = 1st; then others as self. When we do this, even with the best of our struggling human effort life makes sense. *The world is ok*, we **find** ourselves reminded that the challenges and difficulties and hardships are balanced with the beauty of creation, the presence of a friend, the joy of worship... Therefore we are commanded to love, starting with God. cV

Did you notice the psalm started with God first? Praise is what we offer God; it's not a rule, requirement, and commandment even! It's what we find ourselves doing when we stop being 'busy', and start on God's time, place, presence... It bubbles up and out and **God is delighted**, loves, accepts our offerings of praise and worship because God is delighted, loves and accepts us, just as we are. Cv

So our two texts this morning say this is where we start. Our first priority is to be in a one-to-one relationship with God. And one way we respond in this relationship is to offer praise and worship. And if it were just that simple – this would be a very short sermon today!

It's not that simple – is it! Both Jesus and today's Psalm take us deeper in how to live in healthy ways, as good people, as Jesus followers. Loving God first is only a beginning, we **have** to love our neighbours! So who is our neighbour? Today's Psalmist has a list from God. It's about the people God cares for and gives to us to care for as well – in his name, his power, his authority, his Son.

Ps 146:7-9 and it is speaking about God, our God “⁷who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; ⁸the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow,” ... CV Hear the echoes of other Bible passages? In a few more weeks as we get into Christmas proper we will definitely hear echoes in Mary's Song when she arrives at Elizabeth's place. When she sing her prophecy of what God has done, is doing and will do for his people.

And as I prepared this I also wondered how many of you (like me) would start to remember the story Jesus told in answer to this question? The story of the 'Good Samaritan?' I think the issue of just who we have to say is our neighbour was a challenge / problem in Jesus time as much as it is in ours! *I know* all of us here can talk about our 'good neighbours', but we are much more likely to talk about our 'not-good' neighbours, those ones we've had problems with! My problem / our problem I think is that Jesus didn't say – you just have to love **the good neighbour!** He said –love your neighbour!

I mean look at my two pictures and please, I know I'm not a great gardener, put that aside please! But I do love my garden and I have been really enjoying this rose because for the past couple of years, the brilliant yellow of the roses have been against the lovely strong green of a growing pine tree. A tree grown from a seed, I dropped into the garden in the hopes it would grow – and it did! But I have a 'neighbour'. And when we got home from our trip away the rose was once again alone and this was at its base. And Jesus says I have to love my neighbour! Ouch..... CV

Let me widen your thinking and use a little piece from a video given to me as part of my Study Leave, because "Neighbours" are more than the person living next door! There is more to loving our neighbours than the tiny 'my' problem, than an Auckland or even a NZ issue.

This video is by the National Organisation of the Korean Presbyterian Women. I chose to show these few minutes because I think there are two 'neighbourly' points made. The first is that the NKPW send a missionary to China, the Shangdong Province. Who is my neighbour, with whom I can share the Good News of Jesus? Miss Kim Soon Ho was a Korean woman Missionary to China in the late 1920's!

The second story for reflection included is because sometimes loving our neighbour comes with huge costs and much faith wrestling. Because in the last month I had 10 days in Japan and then 9 days in Korea the question of what does it mean to love my neighbour, from this video is very real.

Show video from 4.00 to 5.49 – ((exactly please!))

The Presbyterian Church of Korea is still wrestling with what it means to 'love thy neighbour' from historic, international levels. I wonder if they too (in secret, of course) want to ask: Was Jesus for real when he commanded us to love our neighbour – as ourselves?

I, as much as you want to define who and what and when I can safely 'love my neighbour'. **And we'd all be wrong.** Jesus was for real, and if the Good Samaritan story is anything to go by- he knew exactly what he was saying when he commanded us to love. Love God, and neighbour as self.

I wondered if it would help to approach this challenge another way. You see I think I was on the receiving end of a good neighbour one day when I was studying a metro map for the Seoul Subway. The one I found had English on it – so I was working it out when a voice at my elbow said- a little slowly and carefully – but in English – 'Can I help you?'. Or when the business man – obviously in a hurry, suddenly stopped and turned to me and again in careful English, asked if he could help me – and then insisted on walking me to the correct turnstile...

Through their actions we became neighbours, they gave me the gift of their time, and talents – they thought of me above themselves and even if it was just for 5 minutes. Jesus doesn't put a time limit on his command – he just says we have to do it. Love the good ones and those we'd rather not – and ***please remember*** this includes yourself. If you'd rather not be nice / spend time / don't like 'you- inside' then you have some talking to do to the Lord, or me maybe, as a first step. You can't love others and not yourself, any more than you can only love yourself and dedicate your life to serving *only your own needs*. **And none of this works** if you are not doing your best to put God first in your life.

Jesus says we have to put God first, and then it becomes much more natural for us to do for our neighbour as we would want done for us. The golden rule, found in so many cultures is a healthy principle to live by, and as Christians contains our only commandment. Love others as you love yourself and God. 'Do this and you will live', Jesus says. (Luke 10:28) Amen