

### On Being a Better Global Neighbor

I was a poor Good Samaritan once when we lived in the parsonage – that is, not a very good one.

A gentleman had a heart attack while driving and ended up in our front yard. Neighbor, Harold Mishler, came running out of his house, and then-groundskeeper, Dan Eckert, jumped off his lawn mower and came running. The man was slumped under the steering wheel. Well, I tried to pull him out because there was gasoline leaking and I was afraid of fire or explosion, but I couldn't budge him. Dan and Harold, the 80-plus year-old heart patient, pulled the man out of the vehicle and across the lawn. He had already passed away from the heart attack.

At the time I thought, "Here you are, an able-bodied human being, a pastor of the church, and you can't even pull a man to safety." I didn't feel very good about my efforts. It reminded of the time that my mentor, Pastor Rittberger, rescued a group of Boy Scouts who were out in canoes on Lake Champlain in NY and a wind blew up. The incessant waves prevented the boys from reaching the shore, but they got close enough that Bill could throw them a rope and pull each canoe to shore, along with some mighty-frightened Scout leaders. I was frightened because water and I don't get along, so I watched helplessly as Bill saved the boys.

Ever feel like I did, not very able in emergency situations? It wasn't that I didn't want to help any of these people; it was that my response wasn't full, it wasn't complete, it was restrained by fear of the situation and not knowing what to do. I *knew* who my neighbor was; I lacked a no-fear response, a no-holds-barred reaction, letting the others figure it out.

Today we have a strong story from Jesus. He is responding to a religious lawyer's question designed to trick Jesus into saying something unorthodox and heretical, so that some charge might be brought against him. Jesus goes right for the religious person's jugular. He tells about a Jewish man lying beaten up on a dangerous road, probably looking dead to any passerby. Two religious professionals passed by, took one look and kept on moving; if they touched a dead person it would make them unclean. As they hustled on, a Samaritan came along. N.T. Wright says, "In Jesus' day, the Samaritans and the Jews hated each other like poison." (*Luke for Everyone*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2004, p. 127) They were enemies from time immemorial – and still are, Jews and Palestinians fighting over the same little New Jersey-sized plot of land called Israel.

Along came the sworn enemy of the Jew, and he stopped. The Samaritan had compassion on the man, saw that he wasn't dead, bandaged his wounds, and put him on his own ride to take him to

an inn for recovery. The Samaritan pays for care for the Jewish man and promises (his word was law) to pay more if needed on his way back. The point: your enemy is your neighbor, your friend is your neighbor, everyone is your neighbor – care for them as best you can, even if the care you provide isn't very good or very thorough or very courageous or very strong.

In my mind, the world seems to be doing a poor job of caring for people fleeing war in the Middle East. One country erects barbed wire, while others, simply overwhelmed by needy people, don't know what to do with them. Why isn't this crisis being addressed globally and vigorously? Maybe it is and I'm not in the loop! Lutherans, you know, are in the midst of the crisis through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, making the difference they can. They estimate "Over four million refugees have fled war-torn Syria with no permanent safety in sight."

Here is another opportunity for us to connect with our politicians. Ask them to work toward a comprehensive plan with other countries not only to care for people fleeing death and abuse but also to address the burgeoning crisis on a global scale. I know it is complicated, but that is why God created greater minds than mine to think through complicated situations and come up with just ways to address them.

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus; he asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus said, "The refugee is your neighbor. Give them backpacks filled with medical supplies. Give them a pair of pants and a shirt, soap and a toothbrush & toothpaste. Give them jars of food, a small Bible, a pair of sneakers, a comb. Have compassion on them and care for them and be their neighbor."

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