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Who is My Neighbor?

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Who is My Neighbor?

Abstract

"How should we have mercy on those who are experiencing the ravages of war, whose very lives are being robbed from them?"

Posting about responding to the less fortunate from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/who-is-my-neighbor/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Who is My Neighbor?

 [all in allthings.org/who-is-my-neighbor/](http://allthings.org/who-is-my-neighbor/)

January 30, 2017

Tom Clark

“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

‘What is written in the Law?’ he replied. ‘How do you read it?’

He answered, “‘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.’”

‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” -*Luke 10:25–29*

“Hello.”

“This is the Pipestone County Sherriff. I have your license plate here. You hit a mailbox with your car and it fell off at the scene.”

“Uh, I didn’t hit any mailbox, sir...I think I would know if I hit a mailbox with my car...”

“Well, I have your plate right here, next to the mailbox.”

The wheels in my teenage brain were turning that day during that unexpected phone call, trying to make sense of the situation. This memory returned to mind last week when I walked outside and was greeted by the sight of my mailbox cracked off and lying on my driveway next to a set of tire tracks.

“What goes around comes around,” some might say. That might be true, but this person didn’t leave a license plate behind for identification. Contrast this with the story Jesus tells when he was asked “Who is my neighbor?”

“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’” (Luke 10: 33–35)

This is a story about self-sacrifice. It is a story of a foreigner going out of his way to help the one who is beaten. He bandages the wounds, pays for safe lodging, and takes onto himself the cost of the attack. For Jesus, it was not a question of who is or is not a neighbor. It is a question of how would a neighbor respond? One becomes a neighbor when one acts out of self-sacrifice to bear the cost of the destruction wrought by others.

So in a way I was a neighbor one Saturday morning when I drove to Edgerton years ago to fix a mailbox and get my license plate back. It did not matter that it was my friend to whom I had lent my car that had hit the mailbox. It became my responsibility to be a neighbor, and to bear the cost of the damage that was done, though only indirectly by me. The neighbor cares about the well-being of others, even if they are from another town, when she finds them beaten and robbed.

It is not always as simple as a broken mailbox. Sometimes our neighbors are far away. Our actions are co-mingled with the actions of others. Sometimes it is more than a mailbox that needs mending. You may recall the picture of the [Syrian boy](#) sitting in an ambulance after being pulled from the rubble following an airstrike. Who will bind up the wounds of this Syrian boy, put oil on his head, and pay for his safe lodging? Who will be a neighbor to him?

A six year old boy from New York wrote a [letter](#) (it’s beautiful, please read it) to then President Obama asking if he would go get the boy and bring him back saying, “We will give him a family and he will be our brother .” This boy wanted to be a neighbor. He offers the boy his home, if only his president would go and get him.

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'
Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'" (Luke 10:36–37)

How should we have mercy on those who are experiencing the ravages of war, whose very lives are being robbed from them? Should we ask for the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses yearning to break free just to be brought here? Should we lift our lamp beside the golden door? Or should we wall our hearts against the refugees fleeing from war? Should we support [executive orders](#) preventing refugees from Syria from coming to America until it is safe for them to return?

To be clear, refugees fleeing from conflict are not the same as undocumented immigrants. That is an entirely different (and difficult) situation. This is about being a neighbor to people who have been bombed out of their homes in proxy wars funded by other countries with weapons we (and others) have made. International law dictates that refugees be cared for, but currently Europe bears the brunt of the burden because it can be reached by foot or raft.

Whoever knocked down my mailbox last week has not yet offered to help fix it, but there is still a chance that he or she will. There is a chance that this person will choose to be a neighbor. We all have a choice to make about whom we will treat as a neighbor. We also have a chance to call those whom we elected and ask them to help. I don't believe that what goes around comes around. But I have been shown rich grace at the expense of one more important than me, and I hope to be a better neighbor in the future, even though it will be costly.