

What does it mean to love others?

Sermon for Ethnos Church, July 29, 2007

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Passage: Luke 10:25-37, Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Intro:

Well, it's great to have everyone here. We've been going through a series called "soul realignment," a series through the book of Deuteronomy in the Bible meant to help us get our hearts, our souls, in line with God. Regardless of where we are in the faith journey, it's important to think about these things. For the last couple of weeks, we've spent our time on a key paragraph known as the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). We've tried to understand and meditate on it, on how it exhorts us to think about God in a certain way- as the One true authority over every aspect of life. And on how it exhorts us to think about God's words seriously, to really think about it in our every day life, to develop relationships and habits that help us think about it. Anybody remember the five habits we talked about?

I don't know how you've taken it in the last few weeks, but my hope is that we really understand how crucial it is to understand how God should have authority over every part of our lives, and how His words are important. I say this because I think we can be prone to think many times that the solutions to our lives don't lie in God- our life is too complex, too unique, too fast, too progressive... and God and His word- well, that's a bit outdated, or that's for those nice conservative people who don't really have a life. Nothing is further from the truth...

Today is our last message on this famous Shema, but we're going to spend our time outside of the book of Deuteronomy. In fact, we're going to look at Jesus' reiteration of the Shema when He came to earth, some thousands of years after the first writing of the Shema. And we want to do this because Jesus is important- His teachings our the center of our community. But more specifically, Jesus modifies the Shema, redefines it really, and so it's crucial that we think about it. I mean, anytime you're going to modify a central creed- that's asking for trouble. It's like adding an extra line to the pledge of allegiance, or to the first amendment, or to the Shahada (muslim creed).

And he redefines it by elevating the place of loving others. In fact, love of God and love others, for Jesus, go hand in hand.

This is what we'll be focusing on, and we'll be asking the question: what does it mean to really love others? To really love "our neighbor"?

Read Text: Luke 10:25-37

What does it mean to love our neighbor?

Well, our story begins when a lawyer, that is an expert in the Jewish religious law found in what we call the Old Testament- the first half of our Bible, stands up and asks Jesus what he needs to do to have eternal life, life with God in the next life. Jesus responds with a question, basically asking- what do you think? What do you think the first half of the Bible would say about this? In the other instances when Jesus teaches talks about this, he will give the answer (Mark, Matt). The scribe replies with a brilliant answer- Love God with all that you are- heart, soul, body, mind. That's from the shema. And love your neighbor as yourself. It's a brilliant answer, dead on. And Jesus affirm him- you're right! Do this, and you will live. This is the essence of what it is to be a follower of God- to love Him, and love others. Of course, Jesus will later elaborate on this more in a very important way, something we don't want to miss out- to love God is to love Jesus, and accept Him as God's representative. We won't get into those passages now, but it's important to note that point here. So love God, love your neighbor- do these things, and you will be a part of those who live with God after this life. Interestingly, this is our first statement in our

mission here at Ethnos, and it's first because it is the most basic and important: love God, love your neighbor.

But our story doesn't stop there, of course. Our friend, the lawyer or scribe, has a question: well, who really is our neighbor? (v.29) This is an interesting question because there could have been some genuine confusion about it. In the Old Testament, the word for neighbor is used often and is applied to a broad range of people, from your best friend to distant acquaintance, from your fellow Jewish countryman to the foreigner in your land. So the man could have been genuinely confused, but I don't think he was. Actually, I think he was asking so he could get away with something, get away from loving in the most comprehensive way. You could say he was a minimalist- what's the least amount of love I can have to get in? A couple of things that point to this understanding 1) the text says he was justifying himself, trying to make sure he was in the right... 2) the text he quotes is from Leviticus 19:18, which might be limited understanding of neighbor to just aiding your fellow Jewish citizen, 3) the rest of the story seems to point here.

Jesus is not into "just doing enough" in the realm of love, and so he tells a story about a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, a dangerous 17 mile journey known at that time as the Pass of Adummim- translated to be something like "the bloody path." It was a journey that went through a rough terrain, full of caves where robbers hid. And so here, a man is robbed, beaten, and left for dead. And Jesus begins to teach us what it means to love our neighbor. There are at least 3 answers to the question we asked in the beginning: what does it mean to love your neighbor?

Loving your neighbor involves loving across racial, cultural, social lines

We see this as Jesus tells how the Priest and Levite- the Jewish religious folk of the day who took care of the duties at the temple- both walk past this person, and how a Samaritan stops and helps the person.

This is a big deal, because the lawyer/scribe who asked this question was a Jewish man, and Jews hated Samaritans! It was a deep hate based on race, culture, religion. The animosity and racism between them was as wicked as the racism between whites and blacks in the deep south, between the Jews and Palestinians today, between Japanese and Chinese of a previous generation, and so on. [They considered them traitors, because they were a mixture of Jewish and non Jewish blood. it is said to eat with a Samaritan was the same as eating pork! Note 9:54-55, 10:37- he can't even say it.]

And so Jesus makes the hero of the story a Samaritan to expose the racism and hate that was in this Jewish man's heart, and to say this: loving your neighbor means loving across racial, cultural, social boundaries. Interestingly enough, the the same chapter in Leviticus that this expert of the law quoted will go on and have this bigger picture of love- love beyond your countryman, in 19:33.

Now, I think most of us here are pretty aware that the issue of loving across racial and ethnic lines is important here at Ethnos; and I pray you are addressing the racist tendencies of your own life. We all have them, we all need to work through our assumptions, judgments, and so on about people not like us.

But today I want to address, in a specific way, some broad issues of the barriers I believe we need to really be aware of in our church as we make sure our souls are probably aligned with God, and I want to use the concept of majority/minority culture here, since the Jewish lawyer was part of the majority culture, and Jesus used a minority group to make his point.

First off, on a more positive note, I want to say thanks Ethnos for getting a good start in loving across the immigration barrier. What I mean is this: the majority of us here are second generation immigrants or onward, the minority is those who have just recently immigrated. Yet in our community currently, recent immigrants are a substantial force in our community, and many of you have been doing a good job loving

across that divide- Friday CG especially, you are awesome, and Stephanie- thank you for your work here. We still have a long way to go, many lessons to learn, but I want to encourage you to keep it up.

Now, to more of the perhaps harder things, specifically in terms of race.

Second generation Asians, or Asian Americans- it would be easy for you to get comfortable here, given that we are probably the largest demographic at Ethnos on any given Sunday, and given that as lead pastor I am Asian. It'd be easy for us to hang with our own, to enjoy the company here at Ethnos without really being stretched. Don't. For the sake of the church, for the sake of Jesus' mission here, don't. If you don't have a non-Asian friend, make one. Seriously. Ethnos always has the potential of being an Asian church because I as the lead pastor am Asian. So don't make this an Asian church. Come, yes. But love beyond.

For our Caucasian members- thank you, thank you for being here. You are heroes in many ways- it is difficult for a majority culture to be a minority culture, but that is what you are doing in many ways- you are a majority culture in UTC, but here at Ethnos you are a minority culture, even though you are still a strong percentage here. I realize you have probably given up some preferences as a result. Thank you for your humility. But do you realize your important call in a community like this? Do you realize that you have a crucial role to play in being a bridge for fellow Caucasians who may not be as culturally inclined, especially those who may have never experienced love beyond culture? Can I ask you to encourage our Caucasian friends and visitors, love on them, and be a bridge for them finding community in this diverse community? To be quite honest, I have been recently concerned with this issue: we've had a number of Caucasian visitors in the last few months, but as of yet few have decided to stay. It concerns me. You are essential to bridging things for them, and ultimately for being a bridge builder in our community, given that UTC still registers as predominately Caucasian.

For the rest of us from a Latin, African, American Indian, South Asian, Arab culture, you are perhaps the truest of heroes here. You're a minority in the UTC community, a minority here at Ethnos. Many of you have faced for sad and unfortunate discrimination in your history, and... well, can I just say a big thanks again, it is an honor for the rest of us to be in community, and ask that you continue to teach us about multiculturalism?

So church- let's make sure we move in the right way here. Let's make sure we realign our souls properly and love properly here.

Loving your neighbor involves loving tangibly and lavishly

As Jesus tells the story, note how much emphasis is given to what the Samaritan does. (read 33-35). Significant in this list of actions is the fact that two denarii is about 24 days worth of hotel stay; the Samaritan is covering 24 days worth of expenses for this guy!

But before we feel too overwhelmed, as if we need to be people who burnout on love...

Loving your neighbor involves being a person of love...

- not about doing some big project.

It's about being a person of love who can love any sort of person. Not that we have to be best friends with every one. But even a simple hi, and genuine how are you doing and thank you in a certain situation, can speak volumes.

Two things about the passage really bring this up. First, note that the Samaritan was just passing through. He had not intentionally set out and said "Ah, it's time to do something loving! It's time to do something for God!" He was just going on a business travel, and bam, there was a situation where love was needed, and there he went.

But the passage emphasizes our need to become the neighbor in another more explicit way, through the mouth of Jesus. Note how the whole story began with the question and emphasis: who is my neighbor. But look at how Jesus ends the story: let's not think about who our neighbor is, let's just be the good neighbor. Note v.36- which of these proved to be the neighbor? The focus has shifted, hasn't it? Jesus asks who was the neighbor... When all is said and done, we need to just be the people of love God wants, we need to "go and do likewise."

And the more we become this, the more we'll realize that the opportunity is there, every day to always be a person of love. And much of it is in little, non-flashy, ways.

Just think about those who live around you- your literal neighbors. Most likely they aren't like you. But have you talked with them? Gotten to know them? Invited them over? The biggest thing that will make an impact in our community, and in our church, is if you and I would just love our literal neighbor. Prayer walk with Jeremy- we saw that it seemed like no one ever knew each other in the apartment complexes... And we shouldn't expect people to... But what if...

Or how about right here? Just think about it, the opportunity to love is huge here every Sunday- most likely there is someone not like you, someone you don't know. In fact, I want us to do something here- stand up, find someone you don't know, and sit next to them.

Now, spend some time getting to know them, and ask each other how you can pray for each other. Don't pray yet, but ask each other how you can pray for each other...

How do you feel right now? Awkward? A rush of excitement?

Restate: loving your neighbor involves 1) loving across racial, cultural social lines, 2) loving in tangible and lavish ways, and 3) simply being a person of love.

Challenge:

- Can I ask you to take one step toward loving your neighbor this way? Perhaps it's getting to know your physical neighbor, setting up lunch or dessert with them. Perhaps it's working through your social, racial, cultural prejudice by getting out of your norm, your click. Perhaps it's getting a more generous spirit. Or perhaps it is getting involved in some of the new initiatives here at Ethnos that are attempts to love our community in a more tangible way...

- But there's an even more basic challenge than this. Before we can love, we must know what love is. We need to be loved. The ultimate Good Samaritan- the one who crossed the biggest barriers, the one who loved most lavishly, the one who was full of love- is Jesus. Here we were- people who had turned our back on God, deserving punishment from Him because of this. And yet Jesus came to us, became one of us, so that he could take our punishment from us and lavish us with all the good things God wants to give us- freedom from guilt, freedom to live a life of meaning and purpose and love. And this all begins when we say to Jesus- come into my life. Come and make me whole, come and be my leader.

We need to know this sort of love before we can love, and so I want to challenge those of us who have never received this sort of love to pray this today: "God, I need to know your love for me today. I realize I am a broken person, a sinful person. Come and make me whole, come and be the leader of my life." If you pray that prayer, we want you to come up afterward so we can help...