



Good Neighbour Project 2017
Sermon Series Outline
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From Stranger to Neighbour

Introduction

This sermon series outline is designed to help congregations in St Albert engage the Good Neighbour Project from a biblical perspective. The action we want our people to take is to engage their actual neighbours in more intentional and meaningful ways, specifically but not exclusively through Block Parties. We thereby practice obedience to Jesus' command that we love our neighbours as ourselves.

This series outline contains suggestions for four sermons. Feel free to use all or some of them and to adapt them to suit your tradition, needs and context. The first sermon engages the whole narrative of Scripture and thus roots the command to love neighbour in God's work of making all things new. The second sermon introduces the idea of what it means to be a stranger. The third sermon helps us move from stranger to acquaintance. And the fourth sermon calls us to deepen relationship with our acquaintances.

The applications in the outlines are basically the same from last year, which are taken from *The Art of Neighboring*. Again, feel free to adapt or be creative as your context dictates.

May the Lord bless you and your congregation as you seek to deepen your understanding of and obedience to Christ's command that we love our neighbours as ourselves.

Sermon One: "Painting the Big Picture"

Basic Idea: The call to love our neighbour as ourselves is rooted in whole story of Scripture. Since the Fall, God has been working to make all things new (Rev. 21.5). This is so much more than simply 'winning souls'. This is about the restoration of all that God has made, so that heaven and earth come together when Jesus returns.

Main Texts: I would trace the whole of the Biblical story, touching on pertinent texts, in the following way:

- Creation (Genesis 1-2)
- The Fall (Genesis 3)
- The Call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)
- The Exodus (Ten Plagues, Red Sea, Wilderness, Law, Tabernacle)
- Leaders (Prophets, Priests, Kings)
- Exile
- Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus
- Holy Spirit
- Sending of the Church
- New Creation (Revelation 21 and 22)

Emphases:

- God created all things to live in harmonious relationship
- Human beings were created to be caretakers/stewards of God's good creation
- The Fall breaks down all those relationships.
- God then works to redeem and restore all things.
- He chooses Abraham and his descendants to be his vehicles of grace to the whole world.
- He leads his people out of Egypt and gives them the Law and the Tabernacle so that they can be a blessing to the nations.
- God gives prophets, priests and kings to help lead this way of life.
- Israel consistently fails and refuses to repent so God sends them into exile.
- Jesus comes as God among us, as true Israel, as the Prophet, the King and the Great High Priest, to bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from death so that we can once more be in relationship with God and become good stewards of all creation.
- The Holy Spirit is sent to be with us, shape us and empower us to be stewards.
- We are sent into the world with the good news of Jesus and to be faithful stewards.
- Christ will one day come again and complete the work of restoration.

Good Neighbour Application:

- Being a good neighbour where we live, work and play is how we can be good stewards and how we can obey Christ.
- So we begin simply and small (i.e. parable of the mustard seed)
- Use the Block Map exercise to help people identify their neighbours
 - If they have done this before, they can chart their progress of knowledge of their neighbours, make note of who the new neighbours are etc.
 - In other words, take an inventory of how well we know our neighbour, but doing so in a shame free context.
 - It may also be useful to have someone from the congregation share a story of how this tool has been helpful in getting to know their neighbours.

- Spiritual disciplines that could be encouraged and incorporated: worship (giving thanks to God for his wonderful story and action in it) and remembrance (making a habit of immersing ourselves in the story)

Sermon Two: “Strangers”

Basic Idea: In our culture we often think of strangers as potential threats. However, a biblical understanding would lead us to see strangers as opportunity for hospitality and generosity. This connects to two main ideas. One, that we as God’s people *are* strangers. Two, that we are sent by God to strangers so that both of us become strangers no longer.

Main Texts:

- Part one: we are strangers.
 - Deuteronomy 6
 - Israel entering the Promised Land as strangers. Everything they receive from God is a gift. They are called to also remember how God has saved them.
 - Colossians 1:21-23
 - We were alienated from God (strangers to him) but through Christ we now belong to Him.
- Part two: we are called to welcome strangers
 - Leviticus 19:34
 - The foreigner or stranger was to be welcomed and provided for according to Israel’s Law.
 - Luke 15:1-2
 - Jesus welcomes everyone to him: sinners, tax collectors, Pharisees etc.
 - There is no stranger not welcome to Jesus
- Part three: sometimes we are sent to be strangers
 - Luke 10:1-24
 - Disciples are sent to rely on the hospitality of others as they share the good news of Jesus

Emphases:

- Dual reality: we are strangers and there are strangers around us
- The responsibility of strangers is to welcome each other and offer each other hospitality.
 - We see this in Christ as he travelled and both received and extended hospitality.
 - We see this in his disciples as they preached in Acts
- We are called therefore to practice this in our neighbourhoods.
- Being a stranger is not bad, negative or threatening. It is a wonderful opportunity to connect, create new relationships, and embody the gospel in fresh ways.

Good Neighbour Application

- Find ways to spend more time in your neighbourhood:
 - Going for walks.
 - Hanging out in your front yard.
 - Greeting people that you encounter.
 - Watch, wonder and pray about what the Lord is up to.
 - Which strangers might he be calling you to meet?
- A story from someone who has tried this would be very helpful here.
- Spiritual disciplines that could be encouraged and incorporated: hope (seeing the neighbourhood as a place where grace can take root and flourish) and imagination (thinking creatively about what could be in your neighbourhood)

Sermon Three: “Acquaintances”

Basic Idea: Now that we have begun to make initial contact with our neighbours, how do we move from stranger to acquaintance? How do we see this movement reflected in Scripture? How can we begin to practice? What are reasonable risks and steps of courage? There is no perfect formula here. Rather, there is a need to trust the Spirit of God to guide and lead.

Main Text: Acts 10

- Part one: God Calls Cornelius
 - Acts 10:1-7
 - God desires to welcome Cornelius into his kingdom
 - Acts 10:8-23
 - God prepares Peter to share gospel with Gentiles
 - He must have cultural barrier broken down for sake of gospel
 - The barrier is the Jewish-Gentile division
 - Peter welcomes Gentiles into the home as guests
 - Acts 10:24-48
 - Peter further breaks tradition by going to a Gentile home
 - He shares the gospel
 - He witnesses God’s action in pouring out the Holy Spirit
 - Peter responds faithfully by having household of Cornelius baptized

Emphases:

- Moving from stranger to acquaintance means crossing boundaries, perhaps even boundaries that we are uncomfortable with.
- The Son of God did this when he took on flesh and came to live among us.
- By his death and resurrection he further removes all fear of death so that we can cross boundaries.
- We need to be willing to have the Lord reveal to us what our boundaries are for not meeting the stranger or for not further developing the relationship:

- Fear, uncertainty, prejudices, cultures, languages, no apparent common ground etc.
- A step of faith can lead to unexpected and amazing things: like Cornelius' experience.
 - A story here of someone's risk (with good and/or not-so-good results)

Good Neighbour Application

- Prayerfully consider those whom you have been encountering as you have spent more time in the neighbourhood.
- Invite them over for a meal.
 - Keep it simple and informal in order to reduce the pressure of the situation and to not make the person feel like they must reciprocate:
 - Soup, pancakes, burgers can all be non-threatening meals.
 - Take the opportunity to get to know each other better: listen and speak.
- Spiritual disciplines that could be encouraged and incorporated: reflection (who to invite, how to invite, what to host, how God is calling) and conversation (some may need/want coaching in the art of small talk and conversation)

Sermon Four: Neighbours

Basic Idea: Now that we have begun to move from stranger to acquaintance, we must keep moving from acquaintance to neighbour. This means being willing to share our lives with the people who lives around us. This means beginning to work together to create a community that reflects the grace, welcome and hospitality of God.

Main Text: Luke 10:25-37 – The Parable of the Good Samaritan

- Part one: the set up (verses 25-29)
 - Strange question the expert asks, because no one does anything to inherit. To inherit someone must die – here is the connection to the cross of Christ
 - The expert wants to define who his neighbour is – not so he can be inclusive, but so that he can exclude.
 - Jesus will flip this on its head by calling the expert and us to *be* neighbours
- Part two: the parable (verses 30-35)
 - Failure of God's people to help a needy man
 - Kindness of the Samaritan (traditional enemy of the Jew) to help
 - Must highlight the irony that the enemy and not the brother actually helps
 - Generosity and risk of the Samaritan
 - Cared for wounds, put him on his donkey, brought a wounded Jew into a Jewish town!!!, paid for an inn and basically left a blank cheque for the innkeeper (who were not known for their trustworthiness)

- Part three: the question and the command (verses 36-37)
 - Who was the neighbour to the hurt man?
 - Be a neighbour in the same way.
 - Note: this is not about earning eternal life: but it is what people who have eternal life do.

Emphases:

- To notice that the question is not about the neighbour “out there” and which of the people “out there” am I responsible to love. The question is about how I can be a neighbour to those who are around me, whether they are in need like the man in the parable or whether they live next door.
- Therefore, this is about a way of living and an identity as God’s people.
- We are to be known for our generosity, hospitality and self-sacrificial giving.
- This is exactly what we see in Jesus, in his life, death, resurrection, ascension and ongoing intercession.
- This is what we see in the early church, especially Acts 2:42-47

Good Neighbour Application

- To think about what it means to become a neighbour
 - Awareness of the whole story of Scripture
 - Awareness of how I once was a stranger to God and now am his child
 - Awareness of the peoples to whom I have become an acquaintance
- To develop practices in the neighbourhood that promote connection and restoration
 - How can I add to my walks and small conversations as the Lord leads?
 - What can I do with others?
 - How can I meet needs or express my own needs?
- Consider hosting or helping a block party
 - Gather neighbours together
 - Share and hear stories
 - Creatively wonder what you could do together to make the neighbourhood a truly wonderful place to live
 - Remembering that the restoration of all things is what God is doing and what he calls us to do
 - A story of someone who has been involved in block parties would be helpful here
- Spiritual disciplines that could be encouraged and incorporated: prayer, hospitality, generosity.