

biblestudy: July 2021

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

July 4, 2021 Text: Proverbs 3:27-30; 6:1-5; 25:20-23 “Proverbs About Being a Neighbor”

These three selections from Proverbs touch a number of real-life situations: relationships (3:30), timely help (3:26), finances (6:1), contracts (6:1), enemies (25:21).

This got me to thinking about my new neighbors. The other day, there was a knock at my front door. That is unusual, so I peeked out the peep-hole and saw a man I did not know and four little children. “Uh, oh,” I thought to myself, “probably going from door to door for some cause.” I opened the door and the man greeted me and introduced himself. Then, one of the children handed me a bouquet of fresh flowers and some drawings.

The man said, “We wanted to introduce ourselves. We have moved in next door to you “ (maybe sixty yards away, their house totally invisible from mine because of the thick woods between our lots). He laughed and said, “I know you probably moved out here in the country to get some nice quiet and peace. I wanted to explain to you why you are going to be hearing a lot of noisy kids.”

We chatted for a while and I assured him that the sounds from the little ones would be just another celebration that life goes on. And thus it has been. When I see them splashing in the stream that runs back of us or hear their happy chatter or even when one cries out for Mama, I am glad that we can share this neighborhood.

July 11, 2021 Text: Ruth 2:4-16 “Neighborly Treatment of an Immigrant”

When I saw the title of this week’s lesson, I thought: There is no way to get everybody on the same page on this topic! Next, I read the focal passage: Ruth 2:4-16.

Suppose I point out that Boaz only accepted Ruth because she was kin to a local, Naomi. That makes it okay to accept the immigrant. HmMMM.

Suppose I make up a scene describing how Boaz built a wall so Ruth could not get into his field, and then I shout: “No! No wall! He let her in.” HmMMM.

Suppose I comment that the only reason this story is being told is because what Boaz did was so unusual in that culture. Everyone else seemed to recognize that the Moabite immigrant had no place in Bethlehem. HmMMM.

One handle for opening this text is to note that Boaz and his helpers all seem to respect God and seek to make decisions that would please God (Ruth 2:4, 12). Perhaps ordinarily some men working in the field might take sexual advantage of a lone single woman, so Boaz makes it clear that such abuse of the immigrant is not to be allowed (Ruth 2:9). Boaz probably remembers that Abraham, the great father in the faith, had left his country to go to a foreign land (Genesis 12:1-3). And, Ruth was willing to work; she was not seeking a handout (Ruth 2:15).

July 18, 2021 Text: Text: Acts 6:1-7 “Seven Selected to Serve”

Let’s just admit it. You can be a good neighbor in a way that I cannot. Perhaps there are ways I can be neighborly that would be hard for you. I can write a well-crafted thank you note or a birthday greeting, but if someone needs a meal they would soon learn that my idea of cooking is opening a jar of peanut butter. Perhaps you can play the piano for our hymn sing; I limit my role to announcing the hymn number.

That’s seems to be what the early church discovered as its ministry began to unfold. We need preachers, cooks, administrators, waiters, and prayer warriors (Acts 6:1-7). And the same folks will not be doing all of this (Acts 6:2). The disciples were clear that one role was not more “spiritual” than another. The people who were to organize the food service were to be “well-respected and endowed by the Spirit with exceptional wisdom” (Acts 6:4). That doesn’t sound like second-class Christians! What role do you have in the church? Are you a teacher?

This lesson comes on the Fourth of July, a time for remembering a pivotal time in our country’s life. Once someone asked me, “Do they have a Fourth of July in England?” I’m sure they do, but perhaps they don’t celebrate the breakaway colonies. Nevertheless, the relationship between the United States and Great Britain has grown into a healthy respect for one another and many shared values. We are many miles apart from one another, but, in a sense, we are neighbors. Perhaps how the United States and England grew from enmity to shared life might give us a clue for getting along with anyone we call neighbor. And, remember, Jesus had a thing or two to say about neighbors. More later! Such are the gifts of God.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *To Pray and to Love* (Fortress Press), Roberta C. Bondi has written: “Because of the presence of the image of God within us, what affects the welfare of one of us affects us all, God included. The bonds that connect us are the bonds of love. God’s love for us, which draws us, but also our love for God and neighbor, which can never be separated from each other.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, teach me how to love...”

Although this text is not about national policy, it does unfold some possibilities for personal relationships and even hints at how society ought to relate to immigrants (Ruth 4:9).

Remember that Ruth’s mother-in-law, Naomi, was an immigrant herself (Ruth 1:1). Maybe because of that experience she knew how tough it could be to be an immigrant, so she encouraged her daughters-in-law to stay in their native Moab (Ruth 1:8-13). For Ruth, personal relationship was more important than national identity (Ruth 1:14). Ruth and Boaz get married and have a son (Ruth 4:13). Out of that lineage came King David (Ruth 4:21-22). Israel’s King David’s grandfather was the child of an immigrant. It would seem that God blessed this journey into a new land. I go back to the title of the lesson and ask “What is neighborly treatment of an immigrant?”

What Someone Else Has Said:

Stephen Prothero (*Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars Even When They Lose Elections*, Harper One) writes: “Was the United States ‘a blend of all the peoples of the world’ in which each of us is forever assimilating ourselves to others?”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin : “Who are we, Lord?...”

A teacher is of little worth if there are not good listeners. Are you a listener? A listener is not very helpful if there is not something worth listening to. We need each other.

In this week’s study text, the church is concerned that some people were getting left out in the distribution of food (Acts 6:1). It was the Greek-speaking widows who were missing the meals. Most of the church probably spoke Aramaic, or maybe Hebrew. It was easy for the minority to miss out. Who are the “minorities” who are not reached by today’s church? Is it based on race or ethnicity? Is it based on having too much money or having too little money? Is it based on sexual orientation or gender identity? Is it “long-time member” versus “new kid on the block”? Are laity seen as second-class members? Are clergy seen as servants of those who pay their salary? Who is left out?

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A good neighbor employs the gifts God has given and does not demean those to whom God has given other gifts. In this account in Acts, some of the church had the gift of sensitivity to the needs of others (Acts 6:1). In this account in Acts, some of the church had the gift of organizing to meet a need (Acts 6:2-3). In this account in Acts, some of the church were called into a new ministry (Acts 6:5-6). In this account in Acts, the whole community endorsed the new and different ministry (Acts 6:6). And in this account in Acts, the Gospel family increased. May it be so for us.

July 25, 2021 Text: Mark 2:1-12 “True Neighbors”

Okay. Let’s deal with the roof problem. These friends of the paralytic made an opening in the roof of somebody’s house so they could get their sick friend to Jesus. Healing and forgiveness is what Jesus did, so that part is not surprising. What is surprising is the disregard for the property of the house.

I’d like to think that these four friends went back later and repaired the roof. It was probably some kind of flat covering, maybe just dried mud. Noted New Testament scholar Vincent Taylor uses almost a full page talking about the roof. He uses Greek words more than a dozen times and quotes others in Latin and French. (Oh, yes, he is writing in English.) Bottom line: we don’t know. Leastways, I don’t!

The neighborliness in this story is that these friends did what they needed to do in order to get the paralyzed man to Jesus. Maybe that is the bottom line of being a true neighbor: getting others to Jesus. Look at Matthew 25:35-40. When you feed the hungry, you have brought them to Jesus. When you show welcome to the outsider, you have brought them to Jesus. When you work at the church clothing closet, you have brought others to Jesus. When you reach out to others even in the prison of their brokenness, you have brought them to Jesus.

Jesus gave this man physical and spiritual healing (Mark 2:5, 11). You’d think the crowd would have burst into applause. At first, some

What Someone Else Has Said:

Justo González (In Lawrence, Campbell, Richey, eds, *The People(s) Called Methodist*, Abingdon) writes: “...in Spanish, there is not even a term for ‘privacy’ as a value; and our term for ‘private’—privado—also means ‘deprived.’ For us, to be too private is also a privation.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, create a community of neighbors...”

of the scribes (the legal experts---perhaps some of them had memorized the United Methodist Book of Discipline!) challenged Jesus ‘authority to forgive sins. He settles the question of His authority by setting the man free of his paralysis. Then, the crowd did start giving Jesus high fives (a rough translation of Mark 2:12).

Question: What does it take to convince me that Jesus can heal and forgive? Answer: the grace of God. I will know that I have recognized Jesus’ power (authority) when I see that I am a good neighbor, helping others to be in touch with the love of Jesus. There may be a few roofs in the way, but I know what a true neighbor does.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In Fellowship of Love (Kingswood Books) Alice G. Knotts writes about the role of women in neighborly racial attitudes: “Persistence and genuine human caring characterized the process used by these churchwomen. Although they met resistance, they made limited, demonstrable, and significant advances for human rights...(They) made changes in their own lives...and at the same time worked for broader social change.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You have the authority, Jesus, so now I name before You those whom I bring to You...”

