

**Series: POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE - February 8, 2009**

**WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOUR?  
Luke 10:25-37**

**I. INTRO**

- A. How many of you **loved** Mister Rogers? How many of you are **still** watching reruns? There was something about his gentleness and kindness that made you **want** to hang with him and **be** his neighbour. Just a few, quick interesting facts:
- How many of you know Fred Rogers was from Pittsburgh?
  - Did you also know that he is an ordained minister?
  - How many of you know that he moved to Toronto for a while? Why—I feel like we're **brothers** in a way!

-I actually **visited** Mister Rogers real neighborhood several years ago—an area of Pittsburgh called **Fox Chapel**, and it is a **very** nice neighbourhood.

1. Wouldn't it be nice to actually **have** a neighbour like Mister Rogers? Nice. Quiet music. The kind of person who might shovel your driveway—as well as his. No wild parties—I mean, can you imagine Mister Rogers throwing a wild party for all his biker friends? **Yes, Mister Rogers! I'll be your neighbour!**
2. Long before Mister Rogers—Jesus told a story that about being a good neighbour. You've probably heard it; it's known as the parable of the **Good Samaritan**.

-In our world, we tend to think that the point of Jesus' story is, "Don't be a jerk—give roadside assistance when someone is in trouble." In fact, there are **Good Samaritan** laws in the US and Canada preventing people from suing people who try to help others in tough situations.

- B. Sometimes when we think of Jesus' stories, we put them in the **Mister Rogers** category of nice little kids puppet stories. Flannel graph. But Jesus' stories weren't like that. They were brilliant—and usually shocking.

-And Jesus story about the Good Samaritan was no different. It wasn't about how people ought to play CAA and EMT. It was a story that asked, "Who do you hate?" and "What does real love look like?" We find it an attractive story—but it probably offended everyone who heard it—including Jesus' followers. Want to know why? If you do—be careful, because Jesus closing words in this story were, "...**Now, go and do the same!**"

**II. WAY MORE RADICAL THAN YOU THINK**

- A. The setting for this story is a question that a guy asked Jesus one day. Let me read the account from Luke's book about Jesus:

**One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" The man answered,**

“‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!” The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:25-29 NLT)

1. Now, if we’d been in the crowd that day, what would we see and notice and feel? -Most likely the **first** thing we would’ve noticed is that the guy asking the question was a really, **really** smart dude. To be an expert in the law—you had to be top dog—the highest of the highest. These guys had memorized the Jewish Scriptures—as well as all the commentaries of other Rabbis. He was a guy you didn’t want to spar with. What’s interesting is that he seems **very** respectful of Jesus. He stood up to address Jesus—and then called him “Rabbi”—a title of respect in that culture.

-But Luke, in recording this, makes it clear that the whole thing was a dance—like a cobra waiting to sink its fangs into a rabbit. He stood up to **test** Jesus—i.e., humiliate him; expose him as a fake or heretic. His sincerity is fake—and Jesus knows it.

-The question is simple: **Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life.** How do I live in harmony with God—and find **real** life, here and forever?

2. Jesus’ response is brilliant; He poses another question: “**What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?**” It’s like Jesus is saying, “This is how you make your living—what do **you** think?” And the man gives the standard answer: “Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind—and love your neighbor as yourself.” Love God...love others. Jesus says, “Correct! Do this—and you’ll live.”

-Jesus **knows** this guy has an agenda—and what he says is like a kung-fu move; this expert either has to drop the whole thing—or show his hand. As Luke, the author says, his **real** deal is to justify how he’s **already** living. So he asks Jesus, “So. Who’s my neighbor?”

3. Suddenly, the real question isn’t about finding life; it’s about neighbors. “How do **you** define the word, **neighbour?**” See, there was this giant debate going on in the first century among the Jewish rabbis and teachers. Most Jewish leaders and teachers defined **neighbor** as someone who is the same race and the same religion as you are. People who are forgiven and on the inside track with God.

-Throughout his teaching ministry, Jesus had been throwing out these little bombs—saying that prostitutes, tax collectors—people **not like us**—are neighbors. So, this is all a set-up. And Jesus responds with this brilliant story. Let’s read it:

**Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. “By**

chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’ “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.” (Luke 10:30-37 NLT)

B. The scenario Jesus creates with this story would’ve been **very** common to the people listening. Most of the priests and temple assistants or Levites lived in Jericho—and worked at the temple in Jerusalem on a two week rotation—so they traveled that road all the time.

1. When Jesus said that a guy had gotten robbed, beaten and left half-dead on this road, it would be like us hearing that someone got mugged or shot in the Jane/Finch area. This road was a hang-out for thieves—and that stuff was in the headlines all the time. The Jericho Road was 17 miles of treachery. And it was narrow—more like a sidewalk with a cliff on one side and a wall on the other. **[PICTURE]**. So when Jesus says that the priest and Levite passed by *on the other side of the road*—it was like sitcom humor with a laugh track. There **was** no other side!

-Now, here’s the **brilliant** part of Jesus story. In that culture, there were only two ways to tell whether or not someone was “one of **us**”—or “one of **them**.” Guess how. By how they dressed and how they talked. This guy’s unconscious and has been stripped. **They can’t tell if he qualifies as a neighbour—or not!**

“How do we know if he’s our **neighbour** or not?”

2. Now, the priest and temple assistant always get a bum rap in this story. In reality, they faced a pretty complicated situation. The rules in Leviticus are **very** tough on those who serve in the Temple. To be considered ceremonially clean, you can’t have touched any bodily fluids—which would included blood—and you can’t have contact with a corpse. If you were ceremonially unclean, you couldn’t serve and you couldn’t eat the sacred meals.

-There are two commands in Leviticus that deal with situations like this. Leviticus 19 says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Leviticus 22 says, that you can’t serve or eat in the temple if you’re ceremonially defiled. So—which command do you violate?

-It’s called **situational ethics**. How many of you are in the business world—and you occasionally find yourself in murky ethical territory. Someone says,

“Hey, just do what the Bible says!” And...it doesn't help! I think this priest and assistant are truly wrestling with what to do. They had to make a decision on which of these two commands was the more **weighty** or important command.

3. So, they decide that ceremonial cleanliness is more important. The priest sees him, steps to the other side, and keeps heading for work. The assistant sees him, apparently takes a **closer** look—and also, does nothing.

-At this point in the story, Jesus' listeners recognize the structure of his story—sometimes called the **rule of three**. You've probably heard it too. A **lot** of jokes that follow that structure. There's this blond, redhead and brunette out shopping...or a priest, a Rabbi and a Baptist preacher go fishing. The first person does something; the second person does the same thing—and, of course, the third person blows the sequence.

-The people listening thought they **knew** how the story would end. Priests and temple assistants weren't real popular in that culture because the temple system was heavily influenced by Rome. So, as they listen, they think, “Figures that the **Temple boys** wouldn't stop!” They think, “I know how this story ends. The third guy will be the ordinary Jewish working guy (in our world—*Joe the plumber*). He's the one who gets it right and saves the day.

-And **then** Jesus does something bizarre. He introduces a **Samaritan** into the mix. Mass whiplash! **Whaaaa?** In our world, it would be a little like telling a story and making a pedophile—KKK--terrorist the hero. People would've thought, “This is the **weirdest** teacher I've ever listened to!” And it gets worse. The Samaritan pours oil and wine on the guys wounds—the very same things temple workers used every day.

-It's hard to plumb the depths of the contempt for Samaritans in the culture. The Samaritans—Jewish people who had intermarried with the Assyrians--were the enemy of everything the Jewish people stood for. At one point they desecrated the Jewish temple by scattering human remains through it. Rabbis said things like, “Whoever eats with a Samaritan is like someone who eats the flesh of swine.” In fact, there was actually a point in Jewish worship services where people publicly cursed the Samaritans.

-And Jesus' disciples were in on this prejudice. In the previous chapter, Luke tells of Jesus and his disciples traveling through Samaritan territory—and when the people wouldn't roll out the red carpet for them, James and John, Jesus' cousins, say, “Hey Jesus, want us to call down some fire from Heaven and turn them into crispy critters? This could add some real weight to your **Turn or Burn** message?” Jesus rebuked them.

4. Jesus offended **everyone** standing in that crowd—even his followers. That, friends, took **guts!** And he doesn't just slip the “S” word into the story—it's like he grinds it in; shoves **everyone's** nose in it! The two religious people did absolutely **nothing** for this guy. The Samaritan went way, **way** out on a limb for him.

-Think about it this way. Imagine a Palestinian Hamas terrorist driving into an Israeli military hospital with an almost-dead Israeli soldier in the back of his jeep. How **safe** would that be? And this Samaritan doesn't just lay his life on the line—he goes all out. He cleans up his wounds, puts **him** on the donkey—while he walks and takes him to an inn. He doesn't just drop him and run; he spends the night there caring for him—and then, in the morning, pays for his ongoing care—promising that he will return and pay **any** additional charges. He doesn't just see a need; he has compassion—and he does, and does and does and does.

-And then as if to really rub salt in this open wound, Jesus goes for the jugular:

**“Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.” (Luke 10:36-37 NLT)**

Notice that the expert in the law is **so** filled with contempt he can't even force himself to say the word, **Samaritan!**

-This story is not about being a nice person; this is not a Hallmark channel story about doing kind things for the people you run into. It is a deliberately scandalous in-your-face story about hatred and prejudice; about who's **in** and who's **out**. It's about how people like you and me tend to love people who love us. It's about how we sometimes say we love people who are far, far away—but take a pass on those who don't like us and don't agree with us—and annoy the **heck** out of us..

-It's about how we will gravitate toward nasty stories about people we don't agree with—even when we don't have enough personal experience to even know if they're true. It's about how **careful** we are, actually, when it comes to who we **define** as our neighbor...and who gets left out.

### III. **WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?**

- A. Sometimes as believers in Jesus, we can be a **little** less than real. You know, dress things up—like hatred--so they don't look quite so stark and ugly. We kind of change the words around, use a different, more *spiritual* tone.

-Kinda like the 10 year old boy who had been down in the basement playing—totally unaware that the priest had stopped by to visit his Mom. He came running up the stairs holding a dead mouse by the tail, yelling, “Mom! Mom! I found this mouse—he came running out from under the workbench, so I threw a board at him—and he flew up against the wall! So I grabbed a broom and bashed him again! He was still wiggling—so I threw a brick at him and **totally** splattered him all over...” At that point he saw the priest—and his Mom—her eyes silently pleading for him to just **stop**, and said, “...And then the **Lord took him home!**”

1. It is so easy to look at this story Jesus told—and get a little self-righteous about the religious guys—particular the expert in the law. We think things like, “What a pathetic dude! So in bondage to his hate! Too bad! He ought to **know** better!”

-But **Jesus'** story points to you and me. It pulls the cover off our lives—and exposes stuff we're rather not see, right? **Right?** He puts the scalpel into three questions we really need to face if we're going to love. The first is, "**Who do you hate?**" Who do you have absolutely no use, no time, and no respect for? Who's the person who belongs to the tribe, the group, the ideology, the lifestyle that makes your blood boil? **That's** your neighbor!

-Who hurt you—betrayed you--gutted you—and **got away** with it—and just **thinking** about them raises your blood pressure? Who's name can you barely say—like "Oh, my **EX...?**" "Oh, **THEM...?**" According to Jesus story, **that's your neighbor!** Can you see why this story caused mass global warming—blew a hole through the ozone layer—when Jesus told it? How many of you are quite excited about the potential of **living out** this story with your life?

2. See, like the people in **Jesus'** audience, we'd like to justify contempt or intense dislike—or hatred—on a religious or spiritual foundation. People do this all the time; it sounds a little like this, **Dear Lord, do I not hate those whom Thou hatest?** And depending on our bent—our sense that we **agree with God** can mean damning liberal people, conservative people, people who don't agree with our values, our faith, our lifestyle, ...or even our music.

-The way this works is that if **you** want to hate someone, slander someone, snub someone—you just define **God** as Someone who can't stand them either. And that makes it **legal**—or, at least, we **convince** ourselves that it does. So—who did **Jesus** hate? Any names or people or groups come to mind? He had some pretty strong words for the super-religious. Read the record. He didn't just care for the poor and disadvantaged--He cared for the tax collectors, the Roman soldiers, and the Samaritans—the people who hated the Jews, hated their religion, hated their temple and hated their lifestyle. Is there **any** example from Jesus' love and Jesus' ways—to hate?

-Please don't miss what I'm saying here. There is stuff in our world that **desperately** needs to be stopped—slaughter, oppression, addiction, racism, greed. But hatred and contempt doesn't stop stuff like that; in fact, they just harden it. Love and compassion are the **only** things that can penetrate the reinforced concrete around these things. Hatred **fortifies** them.

3. One of the forms of hatred that comes up here is racism. Racism—or prejudice is disliking someone—or talking negatively about someone simply because of where they're from, or their accent, or their skin color, or their political views--or even what they look like or smell like. Sometimes Canadians tend to just sadly shake their heads and cluck their tongues when people talk about racism. **Isn't it sad? I'm glad WE'RE not like that!**

-Really? Talk to the people who've moved here from other nations—ask them about that. I'm from the States—and I've felt it and my kids have experienced milder forms of it. And I hear it. Racism, hatred, prejudice, feeling **superior** to others--talking about **them** and **us**—is everywhere. Sad to say, those seeds

are in my heart—always wanting to grow something. I **fight** them—and I **hate** them—but they're there.

-And if you have a real, live **human** heart beating in your chest, it's in yours, too. To say, **NOT ME!** is to live in denial.

-And, like fire, arrogance, superiority, racism—hatred of **any** kind is **always** looking for fuel. And it comes in the **selective** search for little stories. Little tidbits of news, little anecdotes. "See? I **told** you I was **right!**" Hatred always gets spread the same way—in Jesus' day and ours: Person by person; mouth by mouth, story by story.

4. There's only one way I'm aware of to deal with contempt and prejudice. You and I **must** own it—in all of its ugliness. If we don't—we'll keep doing it—and find ways to wrap the Bible around it and make it okay. And it's not. Jesus—the One the Father named as the judge of all things and all people said, "I didn't come to judge the world, I came to save it!"

-Jesus came to **save** Christians—save them from the ugliness of arrogance, contempt and slander!

- B. The first question this story raises is, **Who do you hate?** The second question is, **How will you love?** Let me ask a question I asked last week, **Is it possible to truly love someone and never give, sacrifice, inconvenience yourself, say anything, help or serve?** The answer is—no. Love is more than thinking nice, kind, or compassionate thoughts.

-We can fool ourselves, you know. We see sad pictures—feel **very** powerful feelings—and think, "I must be a loving, compassionate person!" But according to Jesus' story about neighbors—it was the guy who actually took the time to **do** something for the man who got mugged who loved.

1. Last week I was kidding a guy from the church, Chris Hartman, about letting his wife shovel out the end of the driveway. Grace and Chris live right around the corner from us—and I noticed her as I was driving to work. I said, "I don't know, Chris—I'm working on a message on the Good Samaritan, and I might just have to tell people about you!" Then I realized something. **I** was the religious professional who drove by without doing a **thing!** We had a good laugh!  
-But that's the tough thing, isn't it? To really **see** need—**SEE** it, and do something. To not be so pre-occupied about getting where you need to go and doing what you need to do—that you are **fully present** in each moment. You **see** need.

Sometimes need is in your face. A guy from our church was recently given an award for saving someone's life. He was coming back from the cottage in the summer, came upon a horrible accident—and a bloody man with no vital signs. He immediately gave CPR at the scene, saved the man's life. Later, however, the police called him and told him that the man was HIV positive—and had to go through a whole regimen of treatments. He's **fine**—but sometimes helping is risky.

-Let me ask you a question: What's more lethal—external bleeding, or internal bleeding? The need for a **good neighbour** isn't usually found in the middle of blood and glass. You don't have to chase ambulances to find them. They are in your's and my path virtually every day. They **won't** ask for help—you'll have to look into their eyes.

-They're probably people you know—from everyday conversations, in the hallways of your high school or university—ignored, left out of **everything**. It's the person next door going through a divorce—no blood, but whose heart has been crushed. Sometimes, rather than loving those **right in front of us**. And they're harder to help—because they **know** us. There are social consequences to befriending a kid at school, or a person at work, that is left out. It's easier to **help and run**; be a weekend savior—and then go back to walking by the people on the path **right in front of us!**

-But Jesus' call to love others as ourselves **starts** with the people right under our noses. If we can't love and serve them—then going some other place to love becomes hypocrisy. Right?

2. See, the deal is just like the R.E.M. song, **Everybody Hurts...Sometime**. And Jesus summarized **very** concisely what it means to be a good neighbor. You may be familiar with his words.

**So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.  
(Matthew 7:12 TNIV)**

-That's what this story Jesus told illustrates. If you were in this guys shoes; robbed, beaten up, stripped naked and left for dead—**what would you want people to do?** Would it be enough if they said, "You know—I **feel** for you. Hang in—the will to live is really, **really** strong! I'll be back this way in about 2 weeks. See ya then."

-What if they bandaged you up and left you? Or what if they loaded you into their SUV and dumped you at a local motel—with nothing to pay with, because, see, your driver's license and credit card and cell phone went with the clothes. -What makes this Samaritan's love **so profound** is the inconvenience and cost to his love. Love means not just **talking** about Good News; love is **being** Good News to everyone in our path, in our neighbourhood, on our Facebook, and in our family. Love **serves**. Love thinks, "If I were them—what would I want someone to do for me"—and then **does** it!

3. I would like to be the **good Samaritan** in this story, wouldn't you? But sometimes I'm not. See, there's a price tag involved. And it's not about getting out your wallet and credit card. From what I read in Jesus' story here—being a Good Samaritan is not primarily about sending your money to needy causes around the world—or even visiting them. Don't get me wrong—those are **wonderful** things—and important.

-But being a **good neighbour** is a **pathway** job. It's loving and serving those we come across in the course of our daily life. You can **show** long distance compassion, but **love** is about how you treat the people who **really** know you. -Love is about personal interaction—personal care. Love serves; it's a risk. According to Jesus, it's not long distance. It messes up your plans—and it's risky. The religious professionals in his story only risked becoming ceremonially defiled—maybe missing a meal or two.

-But the Samaritan—traveling in **enemy territory**—risked his life to help this guy out. No one travels on enemy turf if they don't have to—so **this** guy had plans, too; but **love** caused him to put his plans aside. It's pretty clear. Loving your neighbor slows you down. It takes time and money you can't afford. **Inconvenient** would be the best word for it. And that's the price.

-But there's a price on **not** loving your neighbor, never serving, never inconveniencing yourself too, isn't there? Anyone ever been in a position where you were really able to help someone in need? How did it feel? Did you think, "Wow, what a waste of time," or was it more like, "I wouldn't have missed that for the world!" I asked the guy from our church about his experience with the guy whose life he saved—and the impression I got was—it wouldn't have made any difference if the guy had had a tag on him that said, "HIV positive"—he **still** would've done it.

-Want to **really live**? Jesus said, "If you want to **live**—like, have a life that's truly, **truly** worth living—love God first, with everything you are—and love your neighbor by doing for them what you would hope someone would do for **you**."

C. The last—and maybe most important question is: Will you do whatever it **takes** to live out God's calling on your life—to love your neighbor—as you would want to be loved by them?

1. One of the barriers could be junk you're carrying around in your soul about another group of people you really don't like—or maybe just one person you can't stand. Hatred and contempt of any kind kills the heart. I think God would say, **I love them more than you can imagine; I see beyond all the stuff you can't stand.** And **then** he would ask: **Would you allow Me to help you with your attitude?**

-If you **will**, then you will live. Hate, racism, judging, slander, prejudice—whatever it's against, grieves God and hurts our ability to love with greatness.

2. But I'll tell you what the **biggest** issue is for everyone here, I'll bet. It's time. Inconvenience. What's more important to people in the GTA—money or time? We'll pay a **lot** of money to save a **little** time. And it takes time to love. You can't love your significant other, your family, your friends—and **certainly** not your neighbor—without taking **time** to do it.

-One of my most shameful moments took place one Saturday when I was in my office in a previous church working feverishly on a message. There was a

knock on the church door—and a Mom and her two daughters were there. She said, “We’re here for the free store. We wanted to get a blanket.” I said, “Oh, that’s *next* Saturday. No one’s here now.” I went back to my message, but I thought, “I’m not sure, but I think something’s *wrong* with this picture. They took a bus here to get help—and *I told them to come back next week!*” I ran to the door—but by then they’d caught the bus. And all I had left was this sick, sick feeling—I had just done a splendid job of playing the part of the priest in Jesus’ story! I’ve forgotten whatever message I was writing—and *so have the people I gave it to*—but I *haven’t* forgotten that moment.

-And that’s our problem, isn’t it? Too busy doing stuff that, when it comes to eternity is totally, *totally* forgettable. But people aren’t. The best gift you and I have to give in this life—is ourselves, not our money. And God doesn’t ring a bell, or give us a kick, or send a jolt of electricity down our spine when the moment comes to love our neighbors as ourselves. Nope. We have to live with open eyes. *We* have to slow ourselves down enough so that people aren’t just a blip in the rear view mirror.

-And if we don’t? Well—it’s simple; we miss the whole point of life. We never *really* live! I don’t want to do that—but I’m at risk. And so are you.

#### IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. You and I have this one chance in life to meet the *greatest* need human beings have. Everyone has it. It’s the hunger to be valued. Loved. One of the stories I cherish most about love is from a book entitled “The Whisper Test”. I’ve used it before—but I’m going to use it again with your permission. The author writes:

**“I grew up knowing I was different and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I looked to others: A little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth and garbled speech. When schoolmates asked, “What happened to your lip?” I’d tell them I’d fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me.**

**There was, however, a teacher in the second grade whom we all adored. Her name was Mrs. Leonard, a sparkling personality. When we had a hearing test, Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in the class and finally it was my turn. I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something, and we’d have to repeat it back. Things like, “The sky is blue” or “Do you have new shoes?”**

**I waited there for those words that God must’ve put into her mouth—those seven words that changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said in her whisper, “I wish you were *my* little girl.”**

No blood. No CPR. No plane trips. Just seven words. And it changed a life!

- B. It doesn’t really take all that much to totally change someone’s life. Just someone who will go through life with, *Won’t you be MY neighbour* eyes. God is calling me—and you. Will you be that person in your world?