

**“Walk as children of light,
for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”**

Over the last two weeks, I have had the opportunity to witness this text come to life in a couple different ways. One was positive, where the light of Christ was bright and shining. And one was not so positive, in which I could argue the light of Christ was being held under a rock, unused and underwhelming. Can you tell I am trying to be a little lenient with the second?

The positive example of people walking as children of the light was witnessed during our recent trip to Disney World. Everything the cast members at Disney do is to help make your experience at Disney, no matter who you are, the most enjoyable and accessible and memorable it can be. Cast around every corner help you navigate entries and exits, assist with carts or stroller watching, prepare food, and help you with trash. In the stores, cast help arrange merchandise in a clean and findable manner. And if you can't find a way to check out quickly and easily then you aren't looking. Most of what I am talking about can be defined as characteristics and qualities of hospitality and hospitality is definitely an embodiment of what it means to “walk as children of light” for hospitality is good and right and true.

The not so positive example I witnessed came at a Wendy's on our trip home from Disney. And talk about two contrasting experiences. I don't know, maybe Disney spoiled us somehow? What happened at Wendy's was less than helpful or hospitable. As I approached to order, 6 different employees continued in conversation as if to ignore and not acknowledge a customer's existence at all. Not one seemed to want to assist or serve in any way. And since I couldn't just go around the counter and enter our order, the only thing I felt I could do was wait. Someone did come and they did take our order, but I will say it was with a reluctance and almost disrupted and inconvenienced manner. A far cry from the cast at Disney willing to serve around every corner. I don't share this to say any of the employees of that Wendy's are bad people, I just think the hospitality, which again I would say is an embodiment of what it means to “walk as children of light”, was absent in my experience.

Walking as children of light also comes to life for us when we consider the meaning and definition of “neighbor.” More specifically, I would like to ask us to challenge ourselves a bit further to consider what it means to be a “Good Neighbor.”

Now, when we hear “neighbor”, what do we think? Do we think next door? Do we think about those who are loving, caring, kind, and concerned with our needs? What and who, do we think? Are those who are near us but don't know us (or we them) neighbors? Are those who

serve us and provide for us (or us them) considered neighbors? If so, are those who don't serve us or provide for us (or us them) not neighbors?

Around our consideration of "neighbor", perhaps we are drawn to and reminded of the story and parable Jesus tells. In Luke, we read that a lawyer challenges Jesus about the Jewish law of Moses. Like any good lawyer, he wants to see if Jesus has considered the definitions of the terms, if Jesus has considered the scenarios to which the law could be applied; so, he asks, "Who is my neighbor?" What Jesus says in response is monumental for us to hear and own.

Jesus begins by saying there is a traveler who is robbed. Unfortunately, we don't know much more about the traveler, now wounded and struggling for breath and life. Was he, or she, someone that had visited the nearby village on business often or was this the first passing? Where were they from? Where were they going? What exactly did they have that the robbers had to have? Must have been some pretty nice sandals or leather bag or hat to draw attention, right?

We also don't know much about the robbers. We just know that there were more than one. It could have been 2 or 52. We don't know their names or their life experiences, much like I didn't know the backgrounds of those working at Disney or Wendy's. Daniel Heath offers, "Maybe one of the robbers was the lookout and drove the get away camel, but they are all called robbers by association." Robbery wasn't the only offense. The law was broken also by the fact that the traveler had been stripped, beaten, and left alone for dead. These are very serious breaches of the Jewish law (not to mention common decency to other human beings).

In the face of these serious offenses, we are still left wondering the answer to the question of the day "Who is my neighbor?" In an implied fashion, we are left wondering whether there is anyone who will prove to be a "good neighbor"?

Ah, here comes a priest. This story is going to end well, right here with the priest, right? A person of cloth is the first responder, a person who wears the collar, a robe and stole, one who went to seminary. Surely one such as this will pray for and care for the traveler. Oh, never mind, the priest passes by on the other side of the road.

Alright then, here comes a Levite. Maybe the priest didn't see the man in the middle of the road, bare, bleeding, and faintly crying for help. We don't have to depend solely on clergy; there are others in the faith community who can assist. The Levite will surely help; that's the worship leader, the one who sings in the choir. Surely, they won't pass, but they too pass on by.

This isn't good news so far. The persons identified with ordained ministry, organized religion, trained to help those in need, and keepers of the law walk right on by the traveler in need. Is the priest or the Levite a "good neighbor"? A far cry and Jesus would agree.

The good news is Jesus doesn't leave us hanging in wonder. Jesus introduces us to the one he believes to be a "good neighbor", a traveling Samaritan.

Now, I am pretty sure the Samaritan was on his way somewhere. I can imagine that when the Samaritan woke up that morning he had other plans: places to be, things to do, people to see. Tending to the traveler would have disrupted those plans and Jesus uses this disruption to teach the lawyer, and we can assume us as well, a lesson. What lesson? The answer to not only "Who is my neighbor?" but what it means to be a "good neighbor". According to Jesus' teaching, a "good neighbor recognizes that disrupted plans must not take priority over others in dire need.

As members of a worshipping community, school, place of employment, or a certain floor in an apartment complex, it might feel as if there is no need to get to know or tend to others in our communities because we already have our members, our friends, our people. It would be then, easier for us to just pass on through. But the question Jesus is asked, and his teaching the question prompts, reveal that our neighbors are more than just those we know or may tend to. If we think of what is all around us and all the places we stop by or pass through, "Who are our neighbors?"

In the story Jesus tells, the question is asked, "Which one was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The lawyer is unaware that Jesus is now cross-examining him about the law. Any person the lawyer names- priest, Levite, Samaritan, robbers- would be the correct answer to the question. The priest, Levite, Samaritan, and robbers, are all neighbors to the traveler, but only one was a "good neighbor." We could also consider the innkeeper who serves in assistance to the Samaritan's request as a "good neighbor" I think.

What I think Jesus is really asking the lawyer to consider with his question is, "Who is the good neighbor?" In response to the story, Jesus tells the lawyer, and us, to:

- "go and do likewise."
- Be aware of when we are crossing to the other side of the path of another human to avoid seeing and tending to their pain: whether the other person is of another religion or no religion, whether we know the other person favors another political agenda, understands a different interpretation of the Bible than we do, or lives across the railroad tracks.
- Be hospitable, helpful, loving, caring, kind.
- Walk as children of the light embodying what is good and right and true.

The texts we have encountered today in both Ephesians and Luke, the charge to walk as children of the light, be hospitable, and be a good neighbor, invite into a reflection that transforms lives. And not just the lives of others, but our own. What we are talking about today is what people become convicted about and build careers and life goals on- helping others, healing, hospitality, serving, causes of transformative justice. And these convictions turned ways of life are what serve to transform the world as we know it to be a reflection of God's light and love.

Therefore, today, we have provided the opportunity to engage in stations that will help us all to encounter and respond to God's word and good news in a very real way. You may recall us doing something similar in Advent. On the back cover of your bulletin you will find a listing of opportunities you will have to encounter as a response to God's word this morning. You don't have to do them all and they don't have to be done in any particular order. Each encounter offers something different and we believe there is something for all to engage and learn- even our children. Spiritual Growth and Sunday school classes will take place this morning at their normal times so these encounters are meant to bridge us from now until then.

Parents with children in worship workshop, we would like to ask you to please go to the Worship Workshop room, Room 101- which is on the backside of the library just down the Chapel hallway- to pick up your children so you can all encounter the stations together. If you have children in the nursery, the nursery will remain available throughout the encountering time and through all the spiritual growth classes and Sunday school time.

If you are worshipping with us on live video streaming, there will be a slide come on the screen guiding you in how you can engage. Resources will also be available on our website to learn more about and engage the transformative justice information and video. This information will remain up for anyone who wishes to do more encountering in the days to come.

Let me run through a quick synopsis of the stations:

Offering

Lemonade and Cookies

Sanctuary- Where, Who, even When AM I... in the story

Narthex- Outreach Initiative (S&O and C&N)

Hallway (Columbarium)- Lenten Banners (coloring and reflecting)

Hallways and Officers' Room- Transformative Justice

Chapel- Prayer

Brothers and sisters in Christ... "Go and do likewise"