

Homily for the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 24- 25, 2020

Readings: Exodus 22:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 1:5C-10; Matthew 22: 34-40

Preacher: Brigit Hurley

[Jesus] said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Who are our neighbors?

Marilyn is raising her 3-year-old grandson, Marcus, who has social-emotional and cognitive disabilities. She struggles with mobility limitations herself. Marcus' preschool program is meeting remotely, and she doesn't have a computer that would allow him to participate. She is concerned that with no support from the preschool teachers and no interaction with friends, his behavioral problems will worsen. She feels scared and isolated.

During this time of COVID-19 and economic hardship, Marilyn is our neighbor, hidden from our view.

The commandment to "Love Your neighbor" comes alive for Christians in the many ministries of congregations and individuals, from food cupboards to homeless shelters to comfort care homes. We become the hands and feet of Christ, showing our love for God by caring for the poor and vulnerable.

As long as they don't *really* become our neighbors. In Monroe County, we've become accustomed to our physical neighbors looking and acting a lot like us. Racist 20th century housing and banking policies and practices have created borders that separate us based on skin color and wealth. The Rochester City School District has the most economically segregated school district border in the country (according to EdBuild). Rochester's child poverty rate hovers around 50 percent, while most Monroe County suburban child poverty rates are in the single digits. Racial disparities mirror this economic separation.

In the tumult of 2020, some Christians are being challenged to expand their notion of "neighbors" to include people who don't live nearby or who aren't asking for our traditional outreaches and charity. They are people reflected in the tiring litany of

disparities—Black women who are three times more likely to die in childbirth than white women, Black men who are 2.5 times more likely to die as a result of police brutality than white men, and young children of color who are less likely to receive Early Intervention services for developmental disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception, with illness and reductions of income affecting Black and brown families disproportionately.

Those of us who claim to follow Jesus and seek to obey these two great commandments have opportunities right now to love neighbors who may not have been visible before, and who are calling for justice. We can use our voices to break down barriers, reject disparities, and proclaim the dignity of every human person. We can use the power of our vote to say, “No!” to policies that perpetuate racial and economic segregation.

What might change if we truly followed Jesus’ instruction to become like the Good Samaritan who provided extravagant care for a person who did not meet the accepted definition of “neighbor” in that time and place? We can put love in action for those with whom we have little in common, and whom we might hesitate to stop and help—the person we can walk by and never see.

Who are you not seeing?