

Flavor Your world, Mt.5:13-17

Art of Neighboring #5

◆ **Intro:** In her book *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Annie Dillard, wrote about when she lived in rural Virginia and went to meet a neighbor for the first time. The woman came to the screen door and was polite but nervous.

Dillard writes:

She did not let me go; she was worried about something else. She worked her hands. I waited on the other side of the screen door until she came out with it: "Do you know the Lord as your personal savior?" My heart went out to her. No wonder she had been so nervous. She must have to ask this of everyone, absolutely everyone, she meets. That is Christian witness. ... I wanted to make her as happy as possible, reward her courage, and run.

◆ We sympathize with that woman, don't we? She embarrasses us a little, but we sympathize. Because Jesus told us that his disciples fish for people, and that his disciples are to be salt and light in the world. We have to shine if we follow Christ. We have to be salt. But how?

◆ **1. Salt is at it's best when it's out of the shaker.** Jesus is pretty clear in Matthew 5 that if we are followers of God, then we are meant look like God, to point to God, to reflect God, to bring God into the world with us, (though really we are accompanying him who is already at work.) Christians are simply "little Christs".

◆ ""You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. "You

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are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”
Matthew 5:13-16, NIV.

◆A. The Roman’s had a saying in the First Century: “There is nothing more useful than sunlight and salt.” Now that doesn’t mean much to us in our microwavable, ready-to-eat, hermetically sealed, shrink-wrapped, individually-packaged-salad-bags world. But 2000 years ago, sunlight and salt were the only things that kept your food edible more than a day. Tony’s Frozen Pizza may last 4 years in **our** freezer and take 40 seconds to nuke in a microwave, but back in the day, you packed your meat in barrels of salt while sailing to another country, and your bread was “hard as tacks” (hard tac) or so I hear. So Jesus is indicating that his followers are something like preservative for the world, keeping things fresh. Jesus followers are on mission to flavor and preserve of the world around them.

◆“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” *Ephesians 2:10, NIV.*

◆B. Let’s consider a contrast. We are both similar to and different from the Muslim faith: we both believe the God we serve is meant to take over the whole world whether you like him or

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not, although Christians are quite sure you **will** like him very much. But while Muslims sometimes seek God's rule through Holy War (Jihad), Jesus never taught or condoned such action. Jesus makes it clear in our text that it is the good we do in the world that is meant to point human hearts toward the Father in Heaven in praise, and bring the kingdom!

◆let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16

◆We are to be good neighbors to show our neighbors that there is a God who loves them. This is our ultimate motive. So one of our first questions is "Do I want to love these people?" Not "Do I have to convert these people?"

◆**C.** But now let's make the distinction that *The Art of Neighboring* makes, because it is a good one. There is a difference between an ulterior motive and an ultimate motive. An ulterior motive is something intentionally concealed in order to manipulate. An ultimate motive a longed-for destination. I once knew a fellow starting a photography business in town who joined our church near his studio in order to solicit the members. Once he had made a contact of everyone in the directory, we never saw him again. He had an *ulterior* motive. But when a college freshman takes biology, even though it makes her gag, because she hopes to become a ballerina on Broadway, but needs a bachelors degree – well, that's an *ultimate* motive. Bringing people to love and praise God is always our ultimate motive of

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loving our neighbor. But if we make evangelism our ulterior motive (ie, we don't really want to be their friends), we will not make a very good neighbor.

◆ It can never be said that Adele Gaboury's neighbors were less than responsible. When her front lawn grew hip-high, they had a local boy mow it down. When her pipes froze and burst, they had the water turned off. When the mail spilled out the front door, they called the police. The only thing they didn't do was check to see if she was alive. She wasn't.

◆ Police finally climbed her crumbling brick stoop, broke in the side door of her little blue house, and found what they believe to be the 73-year-old woman's skeletal remains, where they had lain, perhaps for as long as four years. "It's not really a friendly neighborhood," said Eileen Dugan, 70, once a close friend of Gaboury's, whose house sits 20 feet from the dead woman's house. "I'm as much to blame as anyone. She was alone and needed someone to talk to, but I was working two jobs and was sick of her coming over at all hours. Eventually I stopped answering the door." Source: Sally Jacobs, "Years After Neighbors Last Saw Her, Worcester Woman Found Dead," ***Boston Globe*** (10-27-93)

◆ Adele's neighbors did good things for her, but they clearly did not have the ultimate motive of love. That's what's supposed to make Christianity unique; we love our enemies, we return good for evil, we love because we are loved, we love because God said

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to, we love like God -without condition, we love without getting it in return. We were made for this. To love our neighbor is an end in itself regardless of what our neighbor does or believes. This can happen through serving, but it is not the same thing as *merely* serving our neighbor, which does not necessarily show the love of Christ.

◆**2. To really love me you'll have to know me.** Did you notice that small phrase in our text, "before men". (Read it again...). God-followers take that seriously. Our fellow man is the *audience* of our love. Now consider, where does the connection to Christ (spiritual truth) come in? [Maybe it doesn't come in because we really don't relate with Christ all that much. After all, when we really love something and share our lives, what we love comes up naturally. So if it doesn't... Or, if we find we never talk about any difference Jesus makes in our lives, perhaps we don't have a very good relationship with our neighbors.] But remember, spiritual things are the deepest of topics. People don't usually share their deepest selves with surface relationships. Faith is a deep part of a person's story.

◆One way to get to a deeper level with your neighbors is to discover their stories. I firmly believe that all of us just want to be known, and loved. And still, many are afraid to be known lest they not be loved once they are known. But more so, we need both. Do you want to love your neighbor? Then you have to know their story.

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◆ Now just as salt brings out something else's flavor, and light reveals something else's color, shape, or beauty, so good neighbors draw out the flavors (stories) of those around them.

◆ This principle is well known in group dynamics. It's why a good Life Group spends time with things like ice-breaker questions, going around the group sharing a response, etc. That way we get to hear from you and one person doesn't dominate. That way we get to know your story. That way relationship builds.

◆ B. How to learn your neighbors story: Ask them about...

◆ 1) Personal information: This is the area of ground level data most of the time we don't go beyond. Where did you grow up? What did your dad do for a living? How did you meet your mate? Why do you wear plaid shorts? You know...

◆ 2) Possibilities: This is the area of dreams, desires, hopes. What do they love? What are they good at? If they could do anything, go anywhere, what would it be? What have they always longed for, thought they'd like to learn?

◆ Beside being on a deeper level of relationship than acquaintances, this neighbor knowledge also allows for them to be significant to us! Let's just say you're the one always solving their problems, or you're the one doing all the work of the block party. You're the local over-achieving, loving neighbor. People don't feel close

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with over-achievers. People want to matter. Do we give our neighbors opportunity to matter to us? Can we accept their help, or ask for it? It's a good way to build relationship.

◆*"At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality," 2 Corinthians 8:14, NIV.*

◆3) Pains (struggles): This is the area of hurt, losses, sorrows. Our hurts are some of the most life-shaping things about us. Pain shared weighs just a little less. So to have people in our lives that listen well enough that we feel our burdens shared, well, –this creates relationship genuine. The converse is also true: if we are in a hurry to advise our neighbor, or loved one for that matter, or if we are in a hurry to fix our neighbor or straighten them out so that they live just like we live –you can be sure they will not feel loved no matter how much you claim to be “just trying to help” them.

◆*"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2, NIV.*

◆**Conclusion:** How many in the room like to eat corn on the cob plain? How about with butter? How many use salt? I know I do. I probably wouldn't eat the corn without salt unless my mother was forcing me. Now when you put down your gnawed-on cob do you say, “Wow, that was really great salt!”? Of course not. Tim

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Keller puts it, "because the job of the salt is not to make you think how great the salt is, but how great the thing is with which it's involved." You say, wow that was some *good* corn! Well, friends, that is what Jesus said we, his followers were to be; something that made the goodness with which we were involved noticed.

◆ The art of neighboring is not about making people your projects. It's about making them your friends. It's about bringing salt and light, flavor and help to their world because of your Father brought it to yours. Share their story with them. And then, share yours.

◆ Now I ask you, is this not exactly what God did for us? He made us his people through our Lord & brother Jesus.

◆ Hebrews 2:14-18 (NIV 1984) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

◆ He shared our story, in order to take us into his story for ever! Just imagine what his light can do.

Story for children:

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While stories of glowing seas have been a part of maritime folklore since the 1700's, they have never been scientifically confirmed. But a group of scientists had an ingenious idea. Using a Defense Meteorological Satellite, Dr. Stephen Haddock and his team discovered a large luminescent area. Roughly the size of Connecticut (110 miles long), the phenomenon was identified in the exact area where the captain had reported his ship that night. Marine biologists discovered that the glowing sea was caused by massive swarms of bioluminescent bacteria feeding on large populations of algae.

Imagine that for a moment. Bacteria are microscopic. But when they congregate together, these tiny creatures, that cannot even be seen by the naked eye, can suddenly radiate their light 600 miles into orbit.

Don't count yourself out of being the "light of the world" because you are young. Though you are small, and a simple good deed may not seem significant, put together with others you still make light!