

Romans 13:8-14

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Sermon

I am struck by this passage in a special way this week. I'm drawn to the way that Paul writes to the Christians who live in Rome and tells them that love is a commandment. In fact, he tells them that love is THE Commandment. He tells them that to love your neighbor is the fulfillment of the law. It's not a suggestion. Not a side-effect. Not just a nice idea or something to try for if you have the time. To love your neighbor is the whole thing.

To love your neighbor is how we live out a Christian life and show our faith to the world.

And what's more: God says we owe it to each other. Love for our neighbors is the debt that we owe, for all the love that we have been shown in Christ Jesus, who gave his life for us in love.

So, when I read this passage from the bible, I can't help to think about some new neighbors we've had around the church lately. I know most of you haven't been around the building, as we all do our part to help slow the spread of this coronavirus. But, over the last few months, I have noticed tents popping up in Spencer Garret Park, just behind the church building here. Each week there had been a few more and a few more. As people who had no other place to turn in a difficult economy and a world with so much need, ended up seeking refuge in a tent in the park next to our church.

And just like that. They became our neighbors.

The ones who live next door.

People that we are commanded to love.

Who, the Bible claims, we owe a debt of love.

And at first it was just a few folks, so I figured that the best way to love them was to just do what I could to support some other neighbors of ours - Colfax Community Network, which uses the

third floor of our building as a resource center for people who are in and out of homelessness. I gave some money to support their foodbank and the social workers that they have here.

But, then more tents appeared, and more people started to seek a refuge there in our neighborhood. And I started to wonder what more we could be doing. And some of you started to reach out to ask the same questions. Because if the church next door, full of Christians who know that it's their job to love their neighbors, isn't going to respond to these neighbors' needs, then who is?

But, it's complicated right now, isn't it? When we can't come too close to people without putting them at risk of getting sick. And so I started talking to a few people about what we could be doing to help our neighbors and live out the love that we have been commanded to have for them. And just when we did, I came into the church one day last week to find that all those tents were gone and people were moving out. They had been told by police officers that they couldn't camp there anymore. That they had to find another place to go.

And I understand that too. There's a lot of reasons not to have people camping in the parks of Aurora. And some are better than others, but they're all real. I know that neighbors worry about their property values, and the safety of their neighborhoods, and whether these public spaces are open to go play with their kids. And the reality is that these parks are not good places for people to live. They weren't built for that. There aren't any bathroom facilities, or places to wash your hands. There's no roof over the heads of the people who lived in these tents. And there would have been no way for them to stay warm when it gets cold on Monday night.

But still, it seems, that if we want to call ourselves Christians, that we must have missed an opportunity here - with all these new neighbors. To fulfill the law that God has given us. To love all of our neighbors. To live out our calling and our commandment. To do what Christians are supposed to do.

And so I went to speak to a few of those neighbors, as they gathered up their things in shopping carts and started to walk through our parking lot as they looked for a new home. I offered them our prayers and I wished them well. I directed them to some resources and some folks I thought could help. And I felt uncomfortable not having done more. I felt like I owed them something. I felt like there was more love that God would have wanted me to share.

I asked where they were going. And they told me they didn't know.

And I realized I don't know either. I don't know what the best way to love these neighbors might have been. I don't know what more we should have been doing. I don't know where to find all the resources we would need to show them the love that they deserve.

All I really know is this. That, though it might be harder to find these people in days to come - they won't stop being our neighbors. And our debt to them will not disappear as they push their shopping carts down the street in search of a new place to live.

So, for today, I think the most faithful thing I can do, is to sit in my discomfort, knowing that I still owe that debt of love.

It's to lift up our prayers to the God whose love we know is great enough to touch the lives of these people, even when we fall short of showing them the same kind of love that God has shown to us.

And to strive to do ever better, in living out God's good command - that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Trusting that God will provide. And that God is not yet done, working through this church. That God is not yet done, working in our hearts. That God will keep on working, until we can fully share the love, that God has shared with us.

Amen.

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