

WOMEN OF WISDOM: MAY 2018
LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF

Have you noticed how wonderfully Jo weaves quotes into her talks and writings

She always seems to find something that just fits perfectly

Look at the quotes in the handout – Jo found these.

So I thought I'd give it a go,

And find some quotes about neighbours

What do you think about these?

Love your neighbour, but don't pull down your hedge – Benjamin Franklin

It is easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one's neighbour – Eric Hoffer

We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next door neighbour. GK Chesterton

Love thy neighbour - and if he happens to be tall, debonair and devastating, it will be that much easier.... Mae West

Neighbours. Everyone has them and everyone has an opinion about them

But how should we think of our neighbours in the context of the passage we've been focusing on

Where loving our neighbours is so entwined with loving God

Well, let me pose and then try and answer these three questions

1. Who is my neighbour?
2. What does loving my neighbour look like
3. What happens when we do?

And then challenge you with a fourth question – but I'll get to that later

Before we dive in though, let me pray for us

Lord, we love you because you first loved us. You have been kind to us. You've given us our life, our faith, this church, and your Word.

We ask you for even more of your grace, that we might learn, grow, believe, and change.

Give to us in these next moments exactly what we need to hear from you. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

So who is my neighbour?

That's a question I'm sure we've all been asked before,

Maybe as far back as in our days in Sunday school

Certainly it's the question that is always asked when we talk about the parable of the Good Samaritan

And typically I'm sure we've all heard and/ or given one of two answers

Everyone or Everyone in need

And of course how can we argue with those as answers?

But today I want to challenge your thinking about what those answers mean

Who is this "Everyone" we talk about?

Well if we're to love them, then surely that "everyone"

can only be those we know or come into contact with

So it's our family, our friends, our next-door neighbours,

the people we bump into in the coffee shop,

or when we're out shopping or on a cruise ship

Well yes, of course they are our neighbours

But it's broader than that, isn't it

Because of course there are all those we never meet

but about whom we are very much aware

Our news screens present them to us every day

The requests we receive from countless charities open our eyes to them

So "everyone" must also include them, right?

But what about the "everyone" we never see

In an age where we wear clothes made in Bangladesh,

watch TV's made in Korea,

drink coffee grown in Guatemala

and buy cheap products from China

we're touching the lives of people we don't even think about

So are they our neighbours too?

And dare I go one step further

What about those who will inherit the world we leave behind.

The things we do today will affect the lives of those who are not yet even born.

Their climate will be affected by the things we do today

The systems of justice and morality they inherit will be based on decisions made today

Australia's future role in the world will be affected by today's politicians and today's votes

So, these unborn people, are they our neighbours too?

Maybe you agree with my very broad view of who my neighbour is,

Maybe you don't

But next time you are asked "who is my neighbour"

Stop and think for a minute

Think about the countless lives you touch as you go about your normal day-to-day existence

And maybe re-think your answer.

Whew

Now onto my second point

What does loving my neighbour look like?

Well, first of all let's reflect again on the standard for loving all these neighbours.

In Matthew 7 Jesus says

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.

But I wonder whether Susan has in fact re-written this into

Do to others what you would do for yourself?

When Susan spoke last week about this last week, she said

Jesus perceives the magnitude of our self love and he makes it the standard for our neighbourly love.

Let me say that again

Jesus perceives the magnitude of our self love and he makes it the standard for our neighbourly love.

Ha – I love this quote from Mark Twain

"It's not what I don't understand in the Bible that bothers me; it's what I do understand that's the trouble."

Thanks to Susan,

I'm now beginning to grasp the reality and enormity
of what it means to love my neighbour as I love myself

So let's examine this a little more

One of the things to mention here is what this word "love" actually means.

Biblically there are two different Greek words for love.

One means the sort of love between family or friends that denotes affection,
to be fond of someone, a matter of sentiment or feeling

But the Greek word used here is Agape

And I think CS Lewis' definition is the one I like for this kind of love

He describes it as *a selfless love that is passionately committed to the well-being of others*

So when we are called to love our neighbour

We are to be selfless, passionate and committed

It's not just about what we do in loving our neighbours

it's also about how we do it

The effort, the commitment, the passion, the creativity

The way we go about loving and caring for ourselves

Is also the way we are to go about loving our neighbours

But what might this look like in our day to day lives?

Well of course the parable of the good Samaritan is a great place to start for this:

But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

Now this is such a well-known parable and I'm sure you've heard many sermons preached on these verses

So I'm not going to go all the way through it

But I do just want to dwell on some aspects that, in a way, were new to me when I read this again

Often we jump to the practical things that the Samaritan does and we try to emulate those.

But I want to pull us right back to the start

To the first three things the Samaritan does

First of all – look with me in vs 33 in your handout

“He saw him”

He didn’t see his colour

He didn’t see his religion

He didn’t see his socio-economic status

He saw him – the man – as an individual

Isn’t this where it must start?

In order to love our neighbours we must first see them.

How often do we go about our lives not even seeing the people around us

In fact ignoring them or worse still trying to pretend they are not there

I know I’m guilty of doing this sometimes

But when we do this, people know that we don’t see them

that we’re not taking any notice of them or their needs

To love as we love ourselves is first to see the person

to see him or her as an individual

an individual with the same needs and wants as we have

We talk often about being self-aware – what about being neighbour aware!

Secondly, again in vs 33, the Samaritan *“took pity on him”*

or in other translations *had compassion for him*

I like this definition of compassion:

sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress, together with a desire to alleviate it

Isn’t this what happens when we ourselves are hurting or suffering in any way

We're very conscious of it

and we want to alleviate it, to make the cause go away

But we can't always do this for ourselves, can we

In the same way we can't always alleviate the suffering of others

But to love others as we love ourselves we must allow ourselves to feel pity, to feel compassion,

and to be moved to want to do something about their plight

1 John 3:17 *If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?*

The third thing the Samaritan does

Vs 34 - "*he went to him*"

What does this mean?

Well he stepped off the path he was on

That Samaritan was going somewhere

He had plans

He had things to do that day

But all that went out of the window when he saw this man in need of help

What about us?

Are we prepared to inconvenience ourselves to help others?

Are we prepared to abandon our own plans, our own needs?

When we love ourselves, we put our plans, our needs, our convenience first

When we love our neighbour this changes

We're prepared to put ourselves out for them, to change our plans for them,

to put our own immediate needs to one side for a time.

I'm sure the rest of the story doesn't need me to explain it so I'll stop there

Because I know that in the same way as the Samaritan gave help and care to the man in need

So too does each of us give this same practical help and care to others

We give our money and our time to charity,

We visit and care for people who are sick or lonely,

We do volunteer work

We give unselfishly of our time to our families and friends.

And that's wonderful and exactly what we are called to do in loving our neighbours

But is it enough?

When we stop and think about all those in need around the world

and how their lives compare with our nice comfortable lives here on the Sunshine Coast

Is what we do for our neighbours enough?

The answer has to be a resounding no

So what do we do?

Well, the risk here is that we all go off on a major guilt trip

I should sell my house, right, and give all my money to the poor

I won't ever go on holiday again

I'll give away all my possessions and live in a commune

But perhaps we can take this passage from 1 Timothy to bring some perspective to this:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

The bible recognises that some people are rich,

and being rich is in no way condemned.

We in Australia are amongst the richest in the world

In fact did you know that according to research from 2016

Australia was in second place in the world for the highest average wealth per adult (Switzerland was top)

So there's no getting away from it,

Whether or not we feel it, we are very definitely rich.

But this isn't what matters.

No! It's not how much we have, but what we do with it that matters.

And it's not how much we give, but the spirit in which we give that counts with God.

Jesus' teaching on the Widow's mite tells us this.

He compared a poor widow, who gave only a little, to the wealthy men who gave much more.

The wealthy men had only given a token amount from their great wealth.

In God's eyes, the widow gave much more because she gave from the heart

Each of us is called to give generously and sacrificially

Whether it's a little or a lot.

So, if we can, then of course we should give abundantly

But whatever we give, we should give generously and faithfully,

trusting that God will see,

that God will use it well

And that God will know we are storing treasures in heaven.

But I think the call to love our neighbours is about more than what we can give

What about being passionate and committed to social justice

Jesus was committed to social justice.

Whilst many of the stories about him relate to his direct interactions with individuals who were suffering,

He also challenged oppressive systems and confronted the power brokers

He denounced cultural and religious practices that created barriers

He advocated on behalf of the poor and the oppressed

Now, we can't individually fix these problems in our world today,

or even make a dent in them

But at the least we should examine our own role in contributing to the systems that cause poverty and injustice

Let me give you a personal anecdote here

Melbourne cup day last year

Big party in our village with everyone dressing up.

Now I've never in my life before owned a fascinator

But it's the thing to do isn't it

However – have you seen the cost of them – Myers \$100+

Even spending \$20-\$30 seems crazy.

But how smug was I
Bit of research on ebay and there it is
The perfect match to my dress
And only \$4.65 delivered all the way from China to my front door
So chuffed that I hadn't wasted too much money on something I'd never wear again
Except after the event I started to think about it
If I can get it delivered for \$4.65
Who made it and under what conditions was it made?
Well I don't know the answer to that
But I bet it wasn't the sort of situation I'd like to be working in.
Now I know that this is an overwhelming problem
and there's not much I can do as an individual to address it
But it has made me think that maybe I don't want to be a part of it
So in future I won't be looking on ebay for the cheapest option for everything
Because I'm just adding to the problem.
Being more socially aware of our global impact
Being conscious of what we buy
These are also ways of loving our neighbours
And it's not a matter of sentiment, it's a matter of our will to do it.
But as with everything concerning the will,
on our own, it's hard for us to stick with it.
We become distracted and selfish.
It takes the grace of God to call us back from focusing on ourselves,
to turn our focus back to Him.
And from there to focus outward to others and not inward to ourselves.

Now, onto my third question

What happens when we do love our neighbours as ourselves?

Can you imagine what the world would be like if everyone did this

No more poverty, no more injustice

No more war or terror

Empty prison cells

Real connection, real relationships

When we look at the implications of this commandment

It's the very foundation of healthy and prosperous lives, in fact of whole societies

And one day this is how life will be for those of us who love Jesus

But we're not there yet.

However we can have glimpses of this, can't we

And we can share these glimpses

Think about the way the lives of some of the people from John's Landing have been transformed

The difference that World Vision makes in the world

The difference a winter warmth hamper makes for someone in the Sunshine Beach Women's Refuge

When we love our neighbours, we give people a glimpse of what God has in store for his people

And what about those times when we're the ones doing the loving

Well, first of all it changes our relationship with people.

Because when we see people as individuals

When we try to find out more about the plight they are in

When we truly draw alongside someone to help them

We get to know them better

And it changes our relationship with them for the better.

But also it brings us joy doesn't it

Joy when we see that we have helped, whether in a huge way or a small way

But also joy because we know that we are pleasing God

Let me finish this particular section with two verses for you from 1 John chapter 4

First vs 8 *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

And then vs 16 *God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.*

When we love our neighbours we know God and God lives in us – wow!

So, if this is what happens when we love our neighbours as ourselves

Why don't we live every minute of our day doing it?

Well, let me remind you what it involves:

We have many more neighbours than the ones who live next door

We are called to love them as we love ourselves

To truly do this requires us to examine every aspect of our lives

It requires us to radically change how we go about things

It calls on us to see each one of our neighbours as an individual

An individual who's suffering we desire more than anything to alleviate

And it requires us to inconvenience ourselves,

To go out of our way to help them

And to give up some of what we have

so that we can give generously and abundantly

Help!

When we see the magnitude of the commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves
well

It's enormous isn't it.

Overwhelming.

It's just impossible to meet this standard that Jesus set for loving our neighbours

In fact, Phil and I were talking about this the other day

(when I was testing some of my ideas on him)

He said

“when you put it like that, it's an impossible standard to meet. No-one could do it”

And of course he's right

No single one of us can meet this standard

All the time

For everyone of our neighbours

But he's also wrong because there is someone who could do it perfectly

Jesus

If we want to know what love of neighbour looks like,

view Jesus feeding the five thousand

view him eating with sinners and loving a prostitute

or see him crossing boundaries to talk to a Samaritan woman and heal a Roman centurion's servant.

If we want to know what neighbour love looks like, go more than anywhere else to the Cross.

See him, while he was dying,

caring for his mother and the disciple he loved.

See him forgiving the penitent thief.

See him asking the Father to forgive those who put him on the Cross

and all the while dying for their sins, for your sins and for mine.

What all this talk of loving our neighbour as ourselves comes down to in the end

is about being Christlike.

Loving our neighbour as ourselves is about seeing people as Christ sees them.

It's about having Christ's heart for them.

We have this glorious, incredible pattern to follow

And yet we struggle so much to put it into action in our every-day lives.

Why?

Well I think it's because it cuts right to the heart of our sinfulness

Because it calls into question every aspect of our nice comfortable lives

the way we live, the way we spend our time,

where and how we spend our money,

what we wear

the things we eat,

All the things that make us feel comfortable, secure, happy

I'm not saying that our sin lies in wanting nice things, good food, great holidays

There's nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves

But when we see these things as the source of our comfort, our security, our happiness

We sideline God

Which is just the opposite of what we were made for.

We were made to love God

And if that is the very purpose of our being then it is also where everything starts.

Because when we truly love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind

We become changed people

And this radically changes how we relate to the people around us

As James reminds us in Ch 2

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

If we claim we love God, then this must result in actions that demonstrate this

Because when we love God,

loving our neighbour becomes an expression of our love for God.

So I come to my final question

The one I didn't ask at the beginning

The big question is not "who is my neighbour"

The big question is who am I

Am I someone whose life reflects that God is first and last and everything to me?

Because If I truly love God with all my heart and my mind and my soul

Then everything else falls into place

Because I want to live for him and to please him

Because everything I want is found in him

And because when I look at others I see only God's image

Amen.