

## **“LOVING OUR FOREIGN NEIGHBORS.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Text for the Sermon: Leviticus 19:33-34**

### **Introduction.**

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr. day. In the past I have used this weekend as an occasion to reflect on what Scripture teaches about race. It is obviously a relevant topic since our county is embroiled in political hand wringing and debates about race relations, Black lives matter, immigration, refugees and secure borders. Soon to be president Trump has stirred up the debate with his rhetoric about building a wall on the Mexico border.

I'm not going to wade into the politics of those issues. I do believe sovereign nations must have secure borders and fair immigration policies and ways to legally control and administer those policies. It is the Constitutional responsibility of our government to “ensure domestic tranquility” and “provide for the common defense” and “promote the general welfare” of our nation. We must pray our leaders have godly wisdom and courage to do that.

But most of us don't have much of a role in those matters. The role we do have is how can we be salt and light in this politically and racially divided culture God has placed us in. How do we show love to our neighbors who are very different from us?

I am interested in looking to Scripture for wisdom from God about how we as Christians should live and act and speak among sojourners and how we are to view them. The fact that Scripture speaks to these issues tells us that God thinks about these things, and it tells us that it's important to Him and so it ought to be to us.

Let's begin by being reminded of why we should love our foreign neighbor, why we should be hospitable and not hostile. *Six reasons.*

### **1. God is our creator.**

“I am the Lord your God.”

We are all created by the same God. God is the source of all life, whether red and yellow, black and white. We are all made in the image of the same God. Skin color, ethnic origin, family background, the language we speak, handicaps and disabilities don't change the fact that we are all created in the same image.

Being a human being is an amazing thing, being made in the image of God is a stunning reality with incredible implications.

How should we treat the image of God in others? With kindness, respect, decency, honesty, fairness, compassion, hospitality. Joe and Alice Hoekema modeled this in their home.

God says He will be a swift advocate for and avenger of those who are treated unfairly or unjustly, especially for those who have no defense and no advocate, such as widows, orphans and sojourners and aliens. God takes a special interest in them and so must we.

## **2. Adam is our father.**

We all are from Noah, and before him, from Adam.

**Acts 17:26** God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.

Historically and genetically we are one race, the human race. The Bible makes no racial distinctions. We are all related, we are all one human family. The blood of the world flows in all our veins.

Anyone can go to a hospital to give blood or to receive blood from any other human being, whether African or Asian or South American, whether Indian, Mexican, or Muslim. One is not better than another. We are to treat the stranger just as we would the native.

There should be no discrimination or disrespect among family.

## **3. We are all sojourners.**

Since Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, we have been living as exiles on earth. After the Tower of Babel we were all scattered across the globe.

Furthermore, America is a nation of immigrants. Other than full-blooded Native Americans, we are all sojourners from other lands. My great grandfather on my father's side emigrated from England in the mid 1880's. My great grandfather on my mother's side emigrated from Germany around the same time.

This congregation is much closer to its roots and historical heritage with many first and second generation immigrants from Holland. We should appreciate this principle of being neighborly to sojourners since we are closer to the same experience ourselves. (Who is born outside US?)

When Moses wrote these words in Leviticus, did they really have to be reminded of how recently they had been sojourners in Egypt? 50 years at the most.

Have they forgotten what it was like in Egypt, how cruelly they were treated, how they were discriminated against?

Have they forgotten four hundred years before that how they were refugees in Egypt because of their poverty and hunger and famine and how they were received with generous hospitality?

Moses is saying, "You know what it is like to be a stranger in a strange land, remember that when you see strangers in your land."

Have we forgotten our refugee status on this earth, that we are fellow wanderers, that God has graciously and generously provided for us, has blessed us that we might be a blessing to others?

Every time we see a minority or a foreigner, or a person who clearly is not from around here they should be a reminder to us of our own real status.

#### **4. Jesus is our redeemer.**

Remember on Christmas morning I said Jesus took His blood from the world and shed that blood for the whole world. Jesus is the only World Savior, the redeemer of all flesh. How does Jesus being a World Savior help us remember to be hospitable and love our neighbors as ourselves?

He reminds us that we are all alike in our sin and as sinners. We can't make a distinction between sinners and non-sinners.

**Romans 3:22b-23** There is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

**I John 2:2** He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

If I think others are worse than me or less deserving than me or something about them makes me want to treat them more poorly, I really need to look in my own heart.

My sin makes me uglier and more deformed than any physical characteristic I can see in someone else. How would I dare despise or look down on someone different than me, when my own sin makes me far worse?

And if God loves me while I was yet an ugly, deformed sinner, how on earth can I not love whatever differences there are around me? How can I shun someone else when God has not shunned me? Every person I meet is a sinner in need of saving grace.

The gospel compels us to love those different from us, who aren't like us. The gospel compels us to hold out to them what Christ has held out to us, compassion, grace, repentance, forgiveness.

## **5. The Church on earth and the church in heaven are racially diverse.**

People sometimes say that 10 am on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week. Yes and no. Don't let our little local expression of the body of Christ cause you to forget how truly diverse the church of Jesus Christ is. This is not the whole picture.

Christianity started in the Middle East and spread to Asia Minor and North Africa. Christianity's early leaders were Africans and Asians long before they were European. Today there are more Christians worshipping south of the equator than north of it. Christianity is truly an international faith, all are welcome, and all should be welcome here.

One reformed pastor summed it up this way:

“There is no entity, no institution, no movement, and no organization that is as multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-national, or multi-linguistic as the Christian Church. It is a tapestry of colors, dialects, and ethnicities. And on that day when we are gathered before the throne of God no one will dare utter the ludicrous and silly idea that Christianity is a Western or ‘white man’s religion.’” (Kevin DeYoung).

**Revelation 5:9** And they sang a new song, saying,  
“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,

## **6. Every person is my neighbor.**

We must love our foreign neighbor because every person is our neighbor. Our neighbor is not just those related to us or those most like us or those with whom we have share particular connection, but extends to the entire human race.

And every neighbor is to be loved as I love myself.

When Jesus was asked who is my neighbor He could have told all kinds of stories or used all kinds of examples. He intentionally broke down prejudices by making it a Good Samaritan, a foreigner, assisting a stranger who was passed by by his own countrymen.

My neighbor is my fellow human who is in need, who needs assistance or love or kindness or compassion or justice.

Love God and love your neighbor, show compassion as you would want to be shown compassion. Would I want to be treated the way I treat others? Live by and teach your children to live by the Golden Rule.

### **Implications and Application.**

President Trump may build his wall, but let us not build walls in our hearts and in our relationships. Let the walls come down. Let Christ be lifted up.

As Christians informed by Scripture and wanting to live and relate in a manner that pleases God we are called to treat strangers, foreigners, sojourners in our midst fairly, justly, humanly, kindly, lovingly. We are not to discriminate or show favoritism based on race or nationality.

I call us and challenge us as a church both personally and corporately to show the greatness of God's love for us and the whole world by seeking relationships with those of all races, cultures and backgrounds, and that this will be a safe place for all such relationships to flourish and a place where racial reconciliation is expressed visibly every time we meet together.

I urge us to welcome the newcomers who come in our doors. Make it a goal every week to greet someone you don't know. One of the loneliest places on earth is right out there in the narthex when you don't know any one and no one knows you. Talk to people you don't know.

When I see a minority here in Lynden, my heart goes out to them. I imagine it's not easy living and working here. I imagine they experience some kind of discrimination every day. I try to make it a point to extend kindness. I try to notice the little people, the overlooked people.

When our son Marc was traveling in the Middle East and went to Egypt he was befriended by some Egyptians who actually intervened on his behalf against some Egyptians who tried to take advantage of Marc. They knew it would happen and made a point to help and extend hospitality to this foreigner in their midst.

Invite people of different ethnic backgrounds to church with you and sit with them. Pray our corporate worship reflects the diversity we will see in heaven.

Our Missions in Action Team is exploring the possibility of an adult mission trips to Africa. There is a meeting after worship next week to talk about it. Consider the incredible opportunity to step out of our comfort zones and our cultural zones and experience first-hand the move of God in a culture different than our own. Begin praying and see if God will use you.

Parents and grandparents you have incredible opportunities to mold and shape your children and grandchildren. And to model what neighborly love and compassion looks like. The way you talk about foreigners, strangers, minorities is heard and remembered.

Teach your children and grandchildren that every human being is made in the image of God, regardless of ethnic background, race, color or handicap. Teach your children that no physical distinction makes some better or worse, inferior or superior. Teach your children to love those who are different from them. Teach your children by your example as well as your words. Remove derogatory or demeaning or racist words from your vocabulary.

By whatever means teach your children all children and all people are fearfully and wonderfully made, regardless of their size or shape or looks or skin color. God made everyone the way they are and God is good, so don't call what He calls good, bad.

One of my favorite kinds of movies are one that show the breaking down of racial barriers. One of our boys favorite movies growing up which we have watched a dozen times was "Remember the Titans," a wonderful story of overcoming racial prejudice and reaching across the lines. Phama and I are looking forward to a date to see "Hidden Figures."

Help your children show love to people different than them. Census predictions are that by 2043 the US will cross over to 50% ethnic minorities. For Christians that news should not cause alarm or fear or make us feel threatened. Christianity has always embraced diversity so we should cultivate those relationships.

May our covenant family here be welcoming and accepting and loving. May God be glorified here and may the glory of His grace which extends to all peoples be reflected and revealed here.

**Prayer:** Our Father and our God, we know that you are no respecter of persons. Grant that we would do no less. From the blood of one man you have made all the peoples of the earth and from the blood of one man you have redeemed those that are yours. As your redeemed make us bold to love you and one another. Forgive us and cleanse from all our prejudice, arrogance, pride, jealousy, hatred, and fear. Establish in our midst, justice, righteousness, love and reconciliation. Jesus, by your Holy Spirit, enable us to walk together in peace and harmony for your name sake to the glory of God the Father.