

Connections

Evangelism Connection

May 2008

Speaking of connections, “Who is my neighbor?” This is the questioning response given in Luke 10 to the simple command of God to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

For the Good Samaritan the neighbor is someone met outside, along the road he traveled regularly. Someone unexpected. Someone different. Someone who would most likely not address him first, but nevertheless someone in need.

What if there was a Presbyterian church known as “Good Samaritan Presbyterian Church?” Not First, or Fourth, or Knox or whatever, but known in the community as the church full Presbyterians who answer the neighbor question with open arms, healing hearts, and backs that share burdens? A church that reaches out because they know that the sovereign God has saved them, not for themselves alone.

There is a new movement called “Externally Focused Churches” which emphasizes just that. Churches that don’t just park on a corner and hope people stop by while they have holy services. Rather externally focused churches are collections of neighbors that go out to help in their own communities. In the PCUSA this has long been an emphasis, and we are reclaiming our heritage. Some of us are involved in tutoring and after school programs, some in emergency preparations, and some who assist the elderly or poor in a variety of ways *that the other people express as needs*. We go out the church doors and expect that God goes before us preparing the way in the lives of those nearby. We meet people by the name they are called: wounded, outcast, lonely, or afraid. And instead we call them, “beloved neighbor.” We care for them in the name of Christ. When asked why we can answer honestly, “The Lord has brought me new life; I want to share it with you.”

What if the church—your church or mine—were known as a people who go out not only to the highways and byways, but also next door, or down the street, to the library and to work and there we love our neighbors? We partner with other churches and we connect with other resources. When we know God’s grace we reach out willingly to extend that grace to whomever the Lord puts in our path. Someone unexpected. Someone different. Someone who would most likely not address us first, but nevertheless someone in need, hoping for good news. That’s evangelism.

“We love because God first loved us.” 1 John 4:19