Who is My Neighbor?
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Pastor Y. Joe Kim

Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' [26]He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' [27]He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' [28]And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.' 29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' [30]Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. [31]Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. [32]So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33]But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. [34]He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. [35]The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." [36]Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' [37]He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

1. A Korean Missionary

I want to thank every one of you for praying for me while I was in Guatemala. It was a great time for me to see what God is doing in Guatemala and what the people down there are doing to serve the community with Christ-like love. I first met a Korean missionary named Luke Rhyee from Guatemala in July 2015. Luke came to a church retreat in my previous church and talked about his mission and the things that were happening in Guatemala. He shared with us about his journey and how he decided to become a missionary. I personally never had a big interest in Guatemala, but the story of the people and the mission work sparked my interest. Later, I found out that St. John's Korean UMC in Lexington, MA had been supporting the Guatemala mission for two years. Rev. Cho, the pastor of the church, invited me to visit with a few other Korean pastors to see what God was doing in Guatemala.

Some of you may already know this well, but Guatemala is a country located in Central America and borders Mexico, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean. The population is roughly 16 million people, and there is a diverse population of different ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic groups in the country. Roughly 42% of the country is Mestizo, which refers to a mix of indigenous and European heritage. About 19% of the population is European and a little under 40% of the population are the Mayan indigenous people. The official language in the country is Spanish. But there are roughly 21 Mayan languages that are used today. The capital, Guatemala City, is a modern city. However, the rest of the country is underdeveloped rural areas.

The mission center that we visited is in the northwest region of the country in an area called Quetzaltenango. The population is about 132,000 people, but the Guatemala mission called Healing Guatemala serves almost 1 million people in the remote mountain regions of Guatemala. Many of the people that the mission serves are indigenous people, often those who can't speak Spanish, and who feel abandoned by their government. The average income for people is roughly $10 a day. Poverty and access to medical care are key problems in the area. Many people in the area only speak Kiche, a Mayan indigenous language, and often cannot get medical treatment from doctors who only speak Spanish.

Luke Rhyee felt the call to become a missionary when he was a teenager. He went to medical school in Korea, became a medical doctor, and built his own hospital in Korea. Although Luke enjoyed taking care of patients in the hospital, he kept feeling the call from God to go into the mission field. So, Luke came to the US, studied theology at Duke University Divinity School, and was ordained in the South Carolina Conference of the UMC. He served for 5 years at Columbia Korean UMC, then felt the call again to go to Guatemala and has been there ever since. Luke's wife and three children live in Atlanta, GA. Yet, I saw through my short time in Guatemala that Luke has become a true friend and neighbor to the people in the country despite being far from his family for most of the year.

2. The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Today's verse might be familiar for many of us. One day, an expert in Moses' law comes to Jesus and asks him what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Instead of giving him the answer, Jesus asks him what the Bible says about his question. The expert answers, "**You shall love the**

Lord your God with your all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (10:27). Jesus says to him, "**You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live**" (10:28). The expert in the Law asks Jesus, "**And who is my neighbor**?" (10:29). To answer to this question, Jesus talks about the parable of the good Samaritan.

Jesus says, as a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. Later, a Levite came to the same place. But when he saw the man, he also went by on the other side. A man from Samaria then came traveling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him and went over to him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then, he put him on his donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next morning, he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "**Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return**." Then Jesus asked, "**Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?**" (10:36) The expert in the Law replied, "**The one who showed him mercy**" (10:37a). Jesus said to him, "**Go and do likewise**" (10:37b).

Having finished the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus asked the expert in the Law who had been a good neighbor to the wounded man. The legal expert answered that the one who showed him mercy-the Samaritan-had been the true neighbor. The Samaritan had loved his neighbor far better than the religious leaders of the man's own people. Even though the Jews hated Samaritans, a Samaritan in the story saved a Jew. Guatemala is very far from Korea. There would be no reason for a Korean to go to the country and help the people there. But when Luke had a sense of call from the Lord, he did not hesitate to go to Guatemala to be their neighbor.

3. Healing Guatemala

The Guatemala mission called Healing Guatemala has a vision to provide healing for diseases, healing from poverty, and healing for the soul. The mission does this by providing medical services, food services, and theological training to pastors of churches in the area. For long-term physical healing, Healing Guatemala supports medical students. Three medical students stay at the mission center and are provided tuition,

transportation, and meals. For some time, Luke felt a little overwhelmed by all the work. But recently, Diane Hatton, a United Methodist Church woman from Long Island, NY, volunteered to stay for 3 months to give meaningful support to the work of Healing Guatemala. She is another good neighbor.

4. The Definition of Neighbor

What is your definition of "neighbor"? According to an English dictionary, the term neighbor means "a person who lives near another." But it has another meaning, which is "a person who shows kindliness or helpfulness toward his or her fellow humans." Luke Rhyee and Diane Hatton have become good neighbors to the Guatemalans and remind us that we are all called to be good neighbors as well.

5. Conclusion

Everyone knows how important our neighbors are and how much good neighbors can make a difference. Without good neighbors, life can often be very difficult. In Korea, there is a saying: "a good neighbor is better than a distant brother." The journey of my family in the US has been filled with stories of good neighbors who have helped us over the years adjust and thrive in this country. To me, these good neighbors in my life and now the people in our church have become my extended family.

6. Application

The question "Who is my neighbor?" is an important question for all of us. Just as God has been helping the people in Guatemala through the ministry of Dr. Luke Rhyee, God wants us to be good neighbors to many people throughout the world both in distant places like Guatemala and our neighbors closer to home here in New England. Last week, Bishop Bruce R. Ough, the president of the UMC Council of Bishops issued a statement regarding the recent executive order on immigration. He said, "I call upon the people of the United Methodist Church to see the face of Christ in the refugee." He reminded us of what Jesus said in Matthew 10:40. "**Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.**" We are called to be good neighbors to the people in our community, in our country, and in our world. There are many foreigners in the U.S. and in other countries who ask, "Who is my neighbor?" and "Where is he or she?" Leviticus 19:33-34 says, "**Don't mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat them as well as you treat citizens and love them as much as you love yourself**" (CEV). The Bible tells us that this is the executive order of our Lord. Amen.