

Who is My Neighbour?

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

12 October 2025

Children's Talk: The Good Samaritan

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?"

And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:29-37)

Who is My Neighbour?

A sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn
12 October 2025

How do you love someone? In many ways the answer to that question is simple. You love someone by being kind and treating them with respect, by doing things that they want, and by being compassionate and forgiving towards them. Yet that same question can become extraordinarily difficult. How do you love someone who has very different wants and needs from you? How do you love someone who has different values? How do you love someone you cannot stand? How do you love someone when they are being cruel or evil? Think of the teacher who is completely unreasonable and incompetent. Think of a classmate or a coworker who constantly has something negative to say. Think of the acquaintance who has no problem with gossiping and spreading rumours and judging people before they know the facts. Think of the guy who just does not realize how irritating they are. Think of the people you know who hurt others without thought. And this is a big one: think of the people who it seems like if you actively show love to them, you're just excusing their harmful behaviour. All these situations are times when it can be hard to love someone, and it can seem like maybe we can't or even shouldn't love them. Yet the Lord says we are to love not only our friends but also our enemies. So how do we love people we don't get along with and disapprove of? How do we love someone we'd rather just slug in the face?

Part I: First Love the Lord

The story we read is all about who and how we love. It begins with a simple question: a lawyer asked the Lord, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" At first that question might not seem to have much to do with loving others. It is a question that

sounds abstract and theological. However, we could rephrase that question as, “what should I do to get into heaven?” and if we apply a New Church idea of heaven, we could go further and express it as, “what should I do to be a good, loving and heavenly person?” Because that is what heaven or eternal life is. So what shall we do to inherit eternal life? Or in other words, what should we do to be loving people? How do we act like angels?

The Lord does not immediately point us to others. His response is to ask the man about his reading of the Law. The Lawyer responds with two quotes from the Old Testament, that to him sum up what it is to be a good person:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10:27)

These two commandments are at the heart of everything that the Word tells us.

There is nothing in the Word that is not about loving the Lord and loving the neighbour (Cf. *Secrets of Heaven* §4353:3, *True Christian Religion* §287). No matter how abstract it might seem, if it is in the Word, it is about love.

And notice that of those two statements, love the Lord and love the neighbour, far more emphasis is put on love the Lord. Loving the neighbour sounds almost like an afterthought. When we are having a hard time with loving someone, this focus can be a great help: we cannot always find ways of loving people, but we can always find ways of loving the Lord. Loving the Lord means respecting what He says and obeying His commandments. As He says, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). So even if we find ourselves in a position where we cannot bring ourselves to love this person in front of us, we can always find ways to follow and love the Lord, and the Lord gives us instructions on how to treat people. One way to

think of it is that even when we cannot love this person, we can love the One who does love them, more than we can even comprehend (*Secrets of Heaven* §2227).

But the Lord also does say love the neighbour. We can't just ignore love to the neighbour. People are the ones who are difficult and confusing. People are the ones who get on our nerves and treat us poorly. People are the ones we have a hard time figuring out how to love. So the lawyer asks, "who is my neighbour?" When he asks the Lord that question he is asking, who should I love? Is there anyone we shouldn't love? Should we support people no matter what they do? What if they are hurting others? What if I just really do not like them? How do I decide who to love?

Part II: Who is My Neighbour?

To help illustrate who the neighbour is, the Lord tells a story. It is the story of the good Samaritan. In this case a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by thieves, robbed, and left by the side of the road to die. And a Jewish priest came along. And he saw the man and deliberately walked along the other side of the road. And then a Levite came along, and he also walked on the other side of the road. Then a Samaritan came along, the outsider. And not just any outsider, but an outsider who was looked down on, from a group that they had conflict with. Yet of all these people, it was the Samaritan who helped the man. It was the Samaritan who used his precious oil to soothe the wounds, who carried him on his own animal to an inn, who spent his own money to make sure that he was taken care of.

The whole point of this parable was to answer the question, "who is my neighbour?" So the Lord concludes by asking, "which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?" And the answer of course is the one who showed mercy, the Samaritan. Our instinct on hearing this story is to see it

as a description of how we can be the neighbour, and it is about that. The Lord says go and do likewise. We do want to be like that Samaritan. But remember why the Lord told the story in the first place: He was answering the question “who is my neighbour?” Who am I supposed to love? That’s the question: can there be some people I just don’t love? Do I *have* to love everyone? This is a story that shows us who our neighbours are. And the neighbour is the Samaritan, the one who showed compassion. That’s the person we are supposed to love.

And we could say, alright, that solves all of those problems: I’ll love the people who are nice to me and not love the ones who aren’t. That would be an easy thing to do, and we slip into that mindset far too easily. Yet that cannot be the message, since the Lord commands us to even love our enemies. There is something deeper going on here. When we look to the Teachings of the New Church, we find that the Samaritan is not a type of person that we should love; life is not about dividing up the world into neighbours and non-neighbours. The Samaritan is a spiritual quality. He represents goodness and compassion and mercy that is present in others. In this story, we are being called to love that neighbourly quality in other people. That quality itself is our neighbour. And again, it does not work to look around and say these people are kind, so they are my neighbour, and these people are not, so I do not need to love them.

Every single human being has good qualities from the Lord in them. Therefore every single human being has something worthy of love in them. When we are stuck with someone we dislike, we don’t have to pretend that we do like them. When we are with someone who is causing harm, we do not have to pretend that we approve of that evil or excuse them entirely. What we do have to do is intentionally look for the good in them. Find those qualities of compassion, mercy, and goodness. And if

you cannot find any, that does not mean they are not there. It simple means that right now you cannot see them. Still acknowledge that they are there, and love the person because they do have goodness in them.

Part III: The Lord is My Neighbour

In answering the question about how to inherit eternal life, or how to be a heavenly person, we start with looking to the Lord. How can everything I say and do reflect what the Lord asks, regardless of how I feel about the person I am dealing with? This is to love the Lord with heart, soul, strength, and mind. Then we go further to love whoever we are dealing with by seeing the good that they have and focusing on that. Find that Samaritan in them, the part of them that is willing to serve. And in fact, these two ideas are one idea. Loving the Lord and loving the neighbour are not two separate concepts. They are one and the same.

There is a passage in the work *Secrets of Heaven* that reveals the connection between the Lord and the people around us. We read,

The different kinds of neighbour - which a member of the Church ought to be thoroughly acquainted with if he is to know the true nature of charity - are determined by the good present in each individual. And since all good comes from the Lord, the Lord is in the highest sense and most prominent degree the Neighbour and origin of the neighbour. From this it follows that a person is the neighbour in the measure that the Lord resides with him, and since nobody receives the Lord, that is, the good which comes from Him, in the same way as another, no one person is therefore the neighbour in the same way as another. For all without exception in heaven and all without exception on earth differ from one another in good. Good is never exactly one and the same with any two people; variation is essential, in order that each kind of good may continue to exist by itself. (*Secrets of Heaven* §6706)

This passage describes how when we love the good in another person, we are really loving the Lord's presence in that person. No matter how different from us they may seem or act, there is still good from the Lord within them. We all have different connections with the Lord. Sometimes the way one person relates to the Lord is so

different from our own that we have a hard time seeing it. The important thing is that we make the attempt to see the good in others because that is the only way we will see the Lord at work. In some sense it is a privilege: our own view of the Lord is limited. When we see good in others, we are seeing the Lord in completely new ways, which gives us a more full view of who the Lord is.

Let's return to the Samaritan. He could not have been sure the Jewish man would want his help. He had other concerns. He did not know exactly what it would take to heal the man. But at least he tried. I want to read the end of that passage, because it says something very similar:

But no one, not even an angel, can know all those variations, thus all the distinctions of the neighbour that are determined by the way the Lord is received, that is, the good coming from Him. One can know them in only an overall way, that is, know the general kinds of variation and some of the specific kinds of these. Nor does the Lord demand anything more of a member of the Church than that he should lead a life in keeping with what he knows. (*Secrets of Heaven* §6706)

We will never know exactly what good a person is doing. Much of the good we do goes by unnoticed, in thousands of little ways. But we should not let that hold us back from searching for the good in others and sharing our own idea of what is good and true. How often do we pass by on the other side of the road, and write someone off simply because we cannot see any good in them, and so decide we cannot help them? Our job is to reach out to the good in them that we *can* see. That is all the Lord asks. It will be uncomfortable. It will be hard. We will make mistakes, and think we are doing something helpful when in fact we are hurting someone. But at least we tried. And that is far more helpful than playing it small, and walking on by without a second glance.

Who is my neighbour? My neighbour is the Lord. No matter what irritations and frustrations and dislikes and even evils are present in the people around me, the

Lord is present too. When you find it hard to love the person you are with, pause, remember the Lord, seek the Lord's presence, and move forward with the true knowledge that the Lord is in and with this person, your neighbour. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

Amen.