

Hinton Rural Life Center
Celebrating 60: Embracing Our Roots & Sharing the Fruits

Reflections . . .

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Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He said to him, "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." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

-- Luke 10:25-29, NRSV

Good day, I'm Angela Johnson. I'm the Associate & Children's Pastor at Sugar Hill United Methodist Church in Sugar Hill, GA. I also serve on the board at Hinton Rural Life Center, and it's a delight to be with you.

This year at Hinton, we are celebrating our 60th Anniversary, with the theme "Embracing Our Roots and Sharing Our Fruits."

Luke 10:27-29 says, "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.' And [Jesus] said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.' But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? Is it the lady who lives next to me? Is it the pale guy who never comes out of his house? In our key passage today, we see a lawyer who's desperately trying to rationalize the terms of the Great Commandment. He asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" To the lawyer, only Jewish neighbors were his neighbors. To Jesus, everyone is a neighbor!

Jesus turns the tables, and, instead of answering the lawyer's question, he tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. If you remember the story, a man was beaten, robbed, stripped, and left for dead on the road. Three men walked by and saw the half-dead man on the side of the road, but only one of them, the Samaritan, stopped to help. Jesus then asks the lawyer: "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

We live in a world that begs the question: *Who's my neighbor?* In other words, can we just get a list of the people we *have* to love? Because frankly, it would be easier if we just knew the A-list, B-list, and C-list of those we *have* to love and who we can just exclude in our day-to-day life.

So, who is your neighbor?

Our neighbors are people who are different from us. Our neighbors are people who speak different languages. Our neighbors are red, yellow, black, and white and precious in his sight. Our neighbors are "seasoned," young, and our elderly friends. Our neighbors are our brothers and sisters in Mexico, Guatemala, the Congo, and Australia. Our neighbors are our brothers and sisters living in Clay, Cherokee, and Towns counties who are experiencing poverty. Our neighbors are the kids who are jogging down the street. Our neighbors are our Clemson fans, Georgia fans, Georgia Tech or Florida fans. Our neighbors are the people we see in the grocery store. Our neighbors are people who are homeless, hungry, thirsty. Our neighbors are disabled. Our neighbors are refugees, immigrants. Our neighbors are Republicans and Democrats. Our neighbors are YOU AND ME.

At Hinton Rural Life Center, we describe our ministry and outreach as "walking alongside our neighbors." Hinton understands that often the greatest need of those we serve in our rural community goes beyond physical needs for safe and healthy homes and firewood, but to the spiritual need of relationship, in which there is presence, support, and encouragement. Hinton staff, Board members, community volunteers, and mission teams from all over the place learn at Hinton that serving is how we show love to God, and that the best way to love God is to simply love who God loves

And who does God love? "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16, NLT) Loving the world . . . loving our neighbors . . . is how we plant seeds that bear fruit, offering everyone the chance for that full and abundant life God wants everyone to have.

So, how will you love your neighbors today and every day?

Prayer: Forgive us, Father, when we have sinned against you. When we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. When we have not heard the cry of the needy. In the valley, God, we know you are there. On the mountain, God, we know you are there. In the middle of our fear, God, we know you are there. When we can't stop the tears, God, we know you are there. No matter where we are, what we face, or where go, God, we know you are there. We pray these things in your Holy name. Amen.



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