

## 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday in Lent – In Community With Our Neighbor – Mark 2:1-

### 12

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of each heart, be acceptable in your sight Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I have a confession to make. It being Lent and all.

I'm hate my mailbox. Not the box itself. It's aluminum and is fairly nice.

However, the contents are another thing altogether. **Every Day** I open my mailbox, 6 days a week, there are anywhere from 5-9 requests for donations. Most of them come from a variety of organizations, most of them come from very worthy organizations. I know because I check. But they are a bit

overwhelming. They come from:

The Anti-Defamation League  
American Kidney Foundation  
Arthritis Foundation  
United Negro College Fund  
Boys Town & Boys Ranch  
Guide Dogs for the Blind  
Yosemite Conservancy  
ELCA World Hunger Fund

Parkinsons Association  
Alzheimer's Association  
Alice Lloyd College  
Meals on Wheels  
Lutheran Disaster Relief  
Adopt a Platoon – 40 people  
National Parks Foundation  
Southern Poverty Law Center

American Bible Society  
Ministry  
Lutheran World Relief  
Environmental Defense Fund

Lutheran Hour Radio  
Lutheran Metropolitan  
Cleveland Food Bank

*And this is no where near a complete list!*

As I said, it's a bit overwhelming. I, like you, are not against helping those in need. We're happy to help those who are not as blessed as we are. However, I can't take care of everyone. If I do, I'm going to be living in my car! That's when I remember something that Chris Rettig said in a

Warmline message she did, when she reminded us that: “The World does not belong to us. This is our Father’s world. We are not responsible for all of it.” Thanks Chris! Are we to do our part? Yes! Are we to care for our neighbors? Yes! Later in the gospel of Mark, Jesus says, We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind and with all our strength. And love our neighbors as ourselves. These are the greatest commandments in all the world.

Bishop Barbins says, “Being in community with our neighbor can be complicated, beautiful, but complicated.” So, how do we love our neighbors?

I think our gospel lesson for tonight can help us out. It’s a familiar text. Jesus is back home in Capernaum, probably at Peter’s house. And Jesus is sharing the Word of God with his neighbors. Jesus has been gone for a while so when all these people hear that he is home, they want to hear what he’s saying. Very quickly a crowd has gathered. There is no room for anyone else - not even in front of the door!!

Now 4 guys come bringing their paralyzed neighbor on a stretcher. They took the time for all 4 of them to get together and BUILD A stretcher and then make the effort to carry the stretcher to Peter’s house. They were **committed** to helping this guy! They had faith to try to get this man to Jesus - who they **trusted and believed** would help him. We don’t know what their names were, but we do know their dedication to their neighbor, and their trust in God.

**\*\*THIS IS OUR FIRST LESSON - WE NEED IS TO BE DEDICATED/COMMITTED TO GETTING OUR NEIGHBOR’S NEEDS MET AND WE NEED TO TRUST JESUS TO WORK WITH US TO GET THAT DONE.\*\***

Now Unfortunately, these 4 guys couldn't get their neighbor near Jesus. But they did not quit!! They probably starting out thinking, "All we have to do is carry this man over to Peter's house and lay our neighbor before our Lord and he will help him." It was a great plan. It didn't work out that way. It wasn't that easy. But I give these guys credit - they didn't put the stretcher down and say, "Well we tried fella, sorry we couldn't help you out."

\*\* And THIS IS OUR **SECOND LESSON** – AT FIRST THINGS MAY NOT WORK OUT AS WE HAD HOPED, BUT WE CAN'T QUIT. It may take some digging!

These guys were not deterred! They were persistent and they got a bit creative. Houses back in Palestine were built with a staircase next to the house that led up to the roof. The roofs were made by putting beams over the house and the spaces between them were filled in with branches and twigs held together with mud, so it kept the house dry. (If only our roof repairs were that easy!) So, the guys took the stairs beside the house that led up to the roof and started digging through the mud and twigs to make a hole so they could lower this man down in front of Jesus.

Bishop Barbins tells the story in one of her Thursday columns, about a church that decided to host a community meal for their neighbors. "A place where people can come and have a warm meal and fellowship. "So, they got volunteers, publicized the event, and on the day, they set up and had members ready to greet their neighbors, but only two neighbors walked through the door and a lot of their own members attended instead. They were obviously disappointed. But they didn't quit. They decided their problem was that they had never really talked to their neighbors about what they needed. They didn't really know their neighbors at all. The bishop continues: They and we need to be in a relationship with them. This was often Jesus first step. To be where they were and knowing who they are. If

things at first don't work out – we may need to get to know our neighbors. Not from afar, not as stories on the news, or statistics, but to know them for who they are, ask them what they need. What would feel like help to them?

To be honest, you may be surprised by how this action of moving close, is the very thing they are craving the most.” And isn't that what all of us really want. Others to move close to us and care about us? That's being a good neighbor! So if at first things don't work out – we don't quit. We go talk to our neighbors!

By the way – in all the New Testament in the Greek, there is only one word for neighbor. It is a compound word which literally means to “fill up or satisfy the needs” of “someone who is near”. It is the Bible's way of saying there are people all around us who need us to be a neighbor to them.

\*Now after digging this hole in the roof – and I'm thinking that the hole these 4 guys had to make, was a sizable one. You can't lower a stretcher through a small hole because the man would not have been able to stay on the stretcher. Now after digging and making this larger hole in the roof, these 4 guys would have had to have ropes to tie to the ends of the stretcher to lower the man down so the stretcher would stay level, and he wouldn't slide off before getting to the ground. So, it would have taken all 4 of them to pull this off for their neighbor.

**\*\*THIS IS OUR THIRD & FINAL LESSON – IT TAKES ALL OF US WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP OUR NEIGHBORS.\*\*** Helping our neighbor is not a one-person job! A few of us won't do. That's why our food pantry is such a support to our neighbors. If it were up to one of us to stock that pantry with food – it wouldn't be enough. But all of us working together and being committed and generous, have filled up our neighbor's

lives with not only good food but compassion, and care!! And they are very grateful!!

That's why our Trunk or Treat worked so well. We had 30 decorated cars in our parking lot to share candy with 50 of our neighbors. Can you imagine if just a few cars showed up? That wouldn't have been very welcoming/inviting to the

**And this public service announcement** – Is brought to you by your Board of witness who is hosting the Community Easter Egg Hunt- it will take All of us again working together to spread the good news of Jesus with our neighborhood children and their families. If you would like to help with that, on Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, please contact Sandy Lapohn or Debbie Lipinski, or me. And we would welcome your help!

Sometimes it takes even more than all of us to fill up or satisfy our neighbors' needs. That's why we partner Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries to help our homeless neighbors to find safe, warm shelter, job training, & employment. And we partner with Redeemer Crisis Center to meet the needs of our neighbors for food, clothing, and children's items.

And finally, we are here also to be neighbors to each other. We are called to care for one another. Be willing to take each other to doctors, dentist or Physical Therapy appointments or anywhere else we can't get to. To bring meals to each other, when we know that because of surgery or illness we can't cook. To call each other when we haven't seen someone in a while. WE are neighbors to each other. And God uses us to fill each other up & **to bless us!**

That's what happened to our 4 guys. Can you imagine how they felt when from their place on the roof, they saw their friend pick up his stretcher (by himself) and **walk off** and go home. **ON his own!!** They were so ecstatic to see that incredible sight, they probably told that story for years! They

would never forget it!! They may have been among those who said, “We’ve never seen anything like this!!” And sometimes that is what our neighbors say to us! I wish at times you could hear the stories of our neighbors who come to our food pantry or some of our Lenten meals, or to our Blue Christmas service. They are grateful and feel cared for, and loved. And that is why Jesus came.

We care for our neighbors because Jesus first cared for us. He was dedicated to meet our needs for a second, third, and 4<sup>th</sup> chance in life, committed to meet our needs for forgiveness, for a deep, abiding love, and for true peace with God. He trusted his Father when He had to dig deep through our sin and shame, to die on the cross to bring us back to God. He never gave up, and He never gives up! There are no lost causes with Jesus. And there can’t be any lost causes with us. Because He’s still working through the Holy Spirit living in each of His baptized people. He’s gathering everyone back to himself, and filling them up with everything they need. Calling them and us, not only neighbors, but something far better - His own beloved children!

AMEN!!