

“Loving Our Global Neighbors”

John 3:16

Pastor Charlie Berthoud | Sermon for Sunday, October 3, 2021

Today is one of my favorite days of the church year. World Communion Sunday!

It's a day to celebrate Christian unity around the world, remembering that followers of Jesus are breaking bread in remote rural church huts in Brazil, in historic cathedrals in Europe, in fast-growing congregations in Africa, in living rooms at home, listening to podcasts while walking around the neighborhood, and even gathering in places like Covenant Presbyterian Church in Madison, Wisconsin.

Some of us have been lucky enough to travel to other countries and to go to church services in other countries. Today is a good day to remember those folks and pray for those folks.

It's also a good day to remember and pray for mission co-workers and church partners we have through Covenant, around the world:

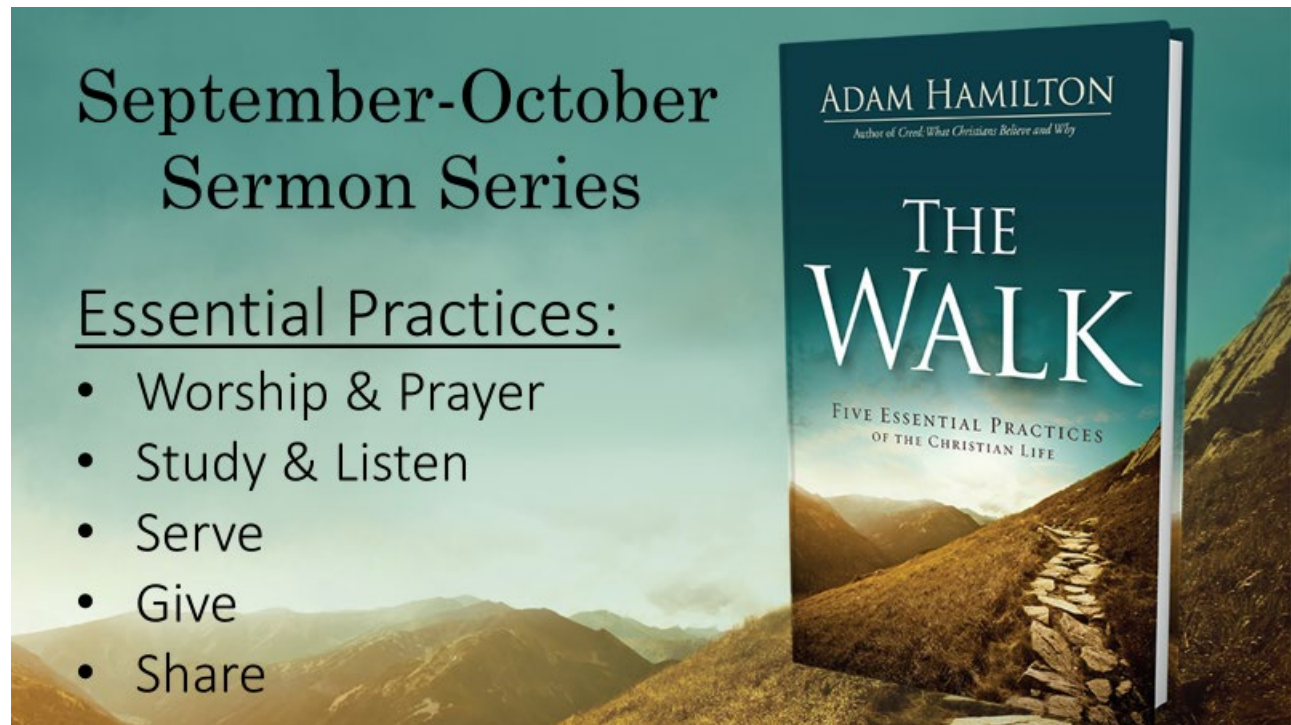
- Guatemala: Betsey Moe, and the Presbyterians in the little town of Santo Domingo
- South Sudan: Shelvis and Nancy Smith Mather
- Indonesia: Farsijana Adenay-Risakotta
- Kenya: Eric Miller, working with Inter-varsity
- Peru: Jed and Jenny Koball
- Haiti: Medical Benevolence Foundation

Our prayers and our mission dollars support all these folks.

World Communion Sunday comes right in the middle of our series on getting back on track, by focusing on our roots.

With the help of the book *The Walk*, by Adam Hamilton, we've been

learning about five essential practices of the Christian life:



So today, with World Communion Sunday, we are taking the liberty of adding another essential practice to the list: **Loving our Global Neighbors.**

Our scripture reading is short and sweet and familiar, reminding us of God's love for the world. Listen for the word of God from the gospel according to John:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

—John 3.16

God loves the world. God loves everyone in the world. This is the good news of the gospel. You are loved by God; I am loved by God; your neighbors are loved by God. Everyone is loved by God.

And God sent Jesus into the world to call us to know and share in this

love. The greatest commandment is to love God and neighbor. And Jesus makes it clear by his life and ministry that he doesn't just mean the people in the next house or apartment.

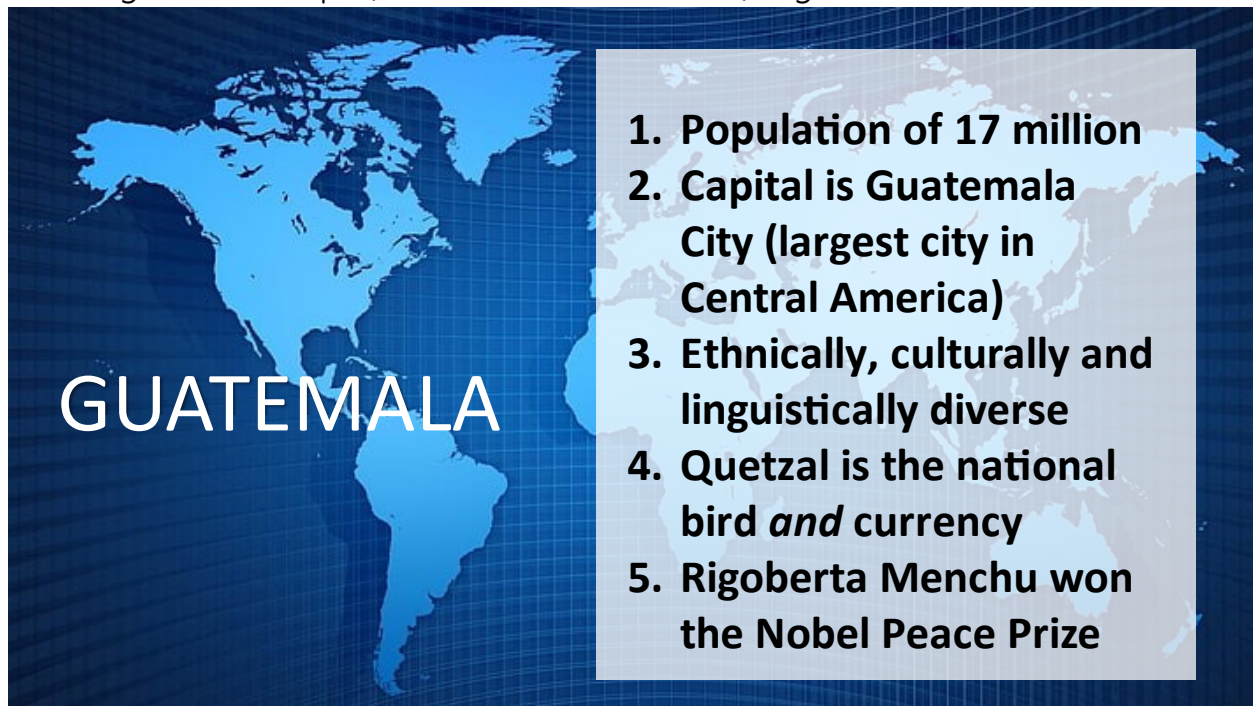
Our task is to make that love real.

So, if we are going to think of loving our global neighbors as an essential practice, we need to figure out how to implement it. For each practice in *The Walk*, Adam Hamilton has concrete suggestions to implement the practice, mostly using the number five, which we have adapted slightly:

- Worship all seven weeks of this series
- Pray five times a day
- Read the Bible five minutes a day
- Do five deeds of kindness each month

So, in the spirit of the fives, I have an invitation to help us learn to love our global neighbors.

Pick a country, any country. Then with Wikipedia or your old *World Book Encyclopedia*, find five interesting things, or fun facts, about that country. For example, if I chose Guatemala, my five fun facts could be:



GUATEMALA

- 1. Population of 17 million**
- 2. Capital is Guatemala City (largest city in Central America)**
- 3. Ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse**
- 4. Quetzal is the national bird *and* currency**
- 5. Rigoberta Menchu won the Nobel Peace Prize**

So, I invite you to pick a country in the news, like Afghanistan or China or Mexico. Maybe pick a country you'd like to visit someday.

Write your five things on an index card and put it at your kitchen table, on your fridge, by your bed—someplace where you will see it over the next week. Then simply pray for the people of that country. Your prayer can be as simple as “Dear God, I pray for the people of Guatemala.”

If you want bonus points, go to the Presbyterian Church USA webpage, and find a mission co-worker in another country, read their letters, watch their videos, and pray for them and that country.

This simple exercise of learning five things and praying for people of another country helps us to love the world that God loves. Parents and grandparents, you can do this with your kids and have fun with it!

I would love to hear what countries you pick and how it goes.

Our world has been increasingly isolated and divided in the past few years because of Covid and because of politics. As followers of Jesus, as people who are loved by God, our call is to welcome God's love and share it. We are the ones called to tear down the walls of division and to build bridges of understanding and hope.

Loving our global neighbors is a good practice to cultivate. Thanks be to God.