

STORIES THAT SHAPE US

PARABLES OF JESUS

“NEIGHBORS & CONNECTIONS”

Pastor Jess Scholten
& Elder Marilyn Krichko

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“Neighbors & Connections” | Luke 10:36-37 | Pastor Jess Scholten & Elder Marilyn Krichko

Jess: The Good Samaritan – such a well-known parable. Like last week’s parable about the Prodigal Son, this week’s parable definitely has the burden of familiarity, especially considering we’ve preached on it literally three times already in the past six months. I’m not gonna read the whole parable, because you heard about it in the Children’s time, but after Jesus tells the story of the priest and the Biblical scholar passing by the man in need and the outcast Samaritan actually helping the man, he asks the expert of the law who is testing him: 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.” Thanks be to God for this God’s Holy word.

I’ve got one of our ruling elders, Marilyn Krichko, who is also taking seminary classes here this morning with me. So, Marilyn, do we have something new to say about this parable?

Marilyn: YES! Charlie talked last week about how parables prompt our imagination. The Good Samaritan reminds me about how we’ve been learning about being good neighbors through Awaken Dane.

God is already working in our community and part of the purpose of awaken Dane is to figure out how we can be part of what God is doing. At the first meeting I found out that Awaken Dane is not about pulling people into our churches, It’s about going out to meet people where they are, in our neighborhoods. It’s about getting to know them and listening to them.

Jess: Ooh, excellent. I guess this is that good excuse we’ve been looking for to share in the wider congregation our work with Awaken Dane. The idea behind Awaken Dane, several churches coming together to learn how to be better neighbors, comes from a story in the Old Testament. Jacob was falling asleep out in the desert with a rock as his pillow. In the night, he dreams about God being with him and protecting him. When he wakes up, he says, “Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know

it!” Awaken Dane embraces that God is at work in our neighborhoods already – our job is, like Jacob, to pay attention and see where God’s at work and join in – to awaken to God’s presence in our very neighborhoods.

Marilyn: One of the activities we did that I thought was interesting was when we learned about “being with, being for, working with and working for.” It gave me ideas about different ways the spirit is working and how I can find my place in it.

Being with - When we are not focused on solving a problem but enjoy people for their own sake. **slide** Example: Meeting up with people for a picnic or a cup of coffee.

Being for - When we focus on supporting ideas or attitudes. Example: Participating in a public protest about a social justice issue.

Working with - When we do things with someone to make their life better. We identify a way to empower others to fix a problem and work alongside them to fix the problem. Example: helping a single parent in the community find work and affordable childcare and checking in to encourage and support them.

Working for - When we do things to make someone else’s life better. We identify a problem and use our resources (time, talent, money) to fix the problem. Example: Making sandwiches and distributing them to people who live on the street.

Jess: I think about that concept a lot – “being with” versus “doing for.” The Spirit is part of all of those things, but sometimes we like to pat ourselves on the back for the “doing for” when what people are really longing for is the “being with.”

I found our post-it notes from when we did this as a group. Some of our being with ideas were things like Connect events, hanging out at coffee hour, Spiritual Strolls. Today during Adult Ed, we’re talking about Guatemala – sometimes we think of a mission trip as a doing for, but in many ways, Guatemala is an accompaniment trip – a time to be together, to show we care about each other’s lives – Being with.

As part of our practical application of thinking about being or doing, we were invited by the Awaken Dane leadership to walk around our neighborhoods and just pay attention. When we got home, we were invited to draw our neighborhoods – not big fancy maps, but simple sketches laying out the spaces where we lived.

Here's my original map, and then I fancied it up with a little watercolor. How did mapping the neighborhood go for you, Marilyn?

Marilyn: You know, when I did that map exercise, it didn't turn out how I expected.

As I was walking out the door, I decided it would probably be a good idea to pray first. And that changed everything. It opened my eyes and the unexpected happened. Instead of drawing streets and houses, I saw people and drew them as little stick figures with the things I knew were going on in their lives. They were things like divorce, health issues, moving to a new country, being overwhelmed, renovating an entire house, moving out of our neighborhood and losing the connections in it, depression, political change involving fear and anxiety...and many other things. As I drew them, I knew in my heart of hearts, I could not fix any of them. These things were all too big for me. So, I prayed even more and then the spirit showed me what I could do. I could invite them to my house for a glass of something to drink and a snack.

Jess: That's really lovely – to just create space for people to “be with.” That was a big project you decided on, which we'll hear more about. Some other folks in the group invited just one other set of neighbors into their homes for a conversation or for dinner. Someone else just sat on a bench in the park – one of our group attended sporting events at the high school across the street. There were all sorts of ways small and big for how people connected with their neighbors. Awaken Dane even offered small – like \$20 little grants to use for various projects. Tell us more about what you created.

Marilyn: There are many ways to follow the spirit. One way, the one I chose, was to create a space at our table once a month for the people God showed me that day. I was scared and that's why I asked you to help me lead the group. Kind of like when Jesus sent people out two by two. Thanks to you being willing to help me, we now a small group of about 7 of us that meet at my house once a month for intentional conversation.

Jess asks Marilyn: I have really loved supporting you and being part of that group. And we've learned a LOT about doing this. I know one thing we learned is that people do really want the invitation. There's a recent statistic going around that 82% of people would go to church if someone invited them (Carey Nieuwhof) This isn't even church – this is just to your house. You got 100% Every single person you invited participated in the first few gathering. People want the invitation.

Marilyn: Those that didn't, I still formed relationships with them in other ways. They weren't ready to commit to a regular group, but they still wanted to get together for coffee and create a more significant relationship.

Jess: So people want that invitation, even if they weren't able to commit to once a month or a group with more people. What else have you learned?

Marilyn: I have learned a lot since we started this back in November. Lesson 1 was to always pray first because the spirit is already at work, and you don't want to miss out on what God is doing.

Lesson two came from the book you suggested: The Art of Gathering – and why it matters. I read it and tried to stick to it, and what I realized is that it helps for one meeting or even a few, but then you can be open to the spirit and being open to what people are wanting to do with that time.

The third thing I learned was that there is no perfect model for what you do or how you do it. You need to do what God is calling you to do. Just like when the Good Samaritan actually stopped and then did something out of the ordinary.

Jess: Most importantly, we learned that simply creating a place of connection and communication and being there for other people is so valuable.

One of the evening's for Awaken Dane we watched an excellent short TED talk from journalist and radio host, Celeste Headlee, "10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation." The entire 12 minutes is worth every second of your attention, but one of the things she says is most important is listening. Let's listen...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1vskiVDwl4&t=2s>

When Marilyn talked about creating hospitable space, one of the things we do is really listen – not listening to respond. There's quite a bit of neuroscience for therapist and behavioral scientists on the benefits of being listened to without interruption – our brains are literally rewiring for health, and we perceive people who listen to us more positively. (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4270393/>)

Marilyn: During the past 7 months, I have experienced relationship transformation with these 8 people – at first they were people I didn't really know, a coworker's spouse, someone I worked on the Shorewood flood with, a person working in a garden, someone new in the neighborhood, a person who used to live across the street. Before, I didn't see them and it felt like we were all too busy to get to know each other. But, now they are people I am really getting to know and we are having real conversations about meaningful things.

I want you to experience this as well. And we want to be a resource as you are a Good Samaritan of connection and care in your neighborhood.

If the spirit is calling you, we can meet with you and generate ideas – and pray with you.

Jess: If this sparks an idea in you, we can help... for sure! Support, funding, Any of us from the Awaken Dane team *show Christmas tree photo* would be happy to talk through ideas, pray with you, or even buddy up if you wanted someone to do a prayer walk with you or host something. We're even considering maybe doing a larger process starting this fall like we went through over the last 9 months with anybody who is interested in seeking to be a good or just better neighbor.

Marilyn: Remember, you don't have to do it alone – I wasn't comfortable to do it on my own, and that's why I asked Jess to help. Let's close in prayer.