

McCabe United Methodist Church
Fall Kick-Off Series: "Won't You Be My Neighbor"

"The World Is Our Neighborhood"

Sermon on Mark 12:28-31 & Galatians 3:23-28 (10.1 & 10.2.16)
Pastor Jenny Hallenbeck Orr

Holy God, you give us words, you guide our thoughts, and you fill our hearts. May these words I speak be pleasing to your ears, may our thoughts be formed in your image, and may our hearts be ever tuned to you; in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

This weekend marks the final weekend of our "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" sermon series here at McCabe – the title of which is from the *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* theme song we just heard.

As we've been moving through this series, I've thought often about a video advertisement I saw online over the summer. I've thought about this particular advertisement because the character featured in it is kind of the *Anti-Mr. Rogers*.

This particular video ad is a couple of minutes long and you don't know what's being advertised until the very last section of it. This video also uses rather... *colorful* language and imagery, so, if you decide to hunt for it online later, just know that I've warned you!

Anyway, the character featured in this video ad is a fictional man named Coleman Sweeney. And Mr. Sweeney was... well, he was a genuinely horrible person. He would take people's clothes out of the dryer at the laundromat – long before they were done drying... stealing whatever pieces of laundry he felt like stealing.

While sitting in his truck at crosswalks, Mr. Sweeney would honk and shout furiously when waiting for senior citizens with walkers to make it across.

He would shoot paintball pellets at his elderly neighbor's dog when it was going to the bathroom outside between their homes. And, on Halloween, when children came trick-or-treating at his house, instead of giving *them* candy, he would take candy *from* them.

In short, Coleman Sweeney was a terrible, terrible neighbor. Like I said, the Anti-Mr. Rogers.

This is what we learn about him at first.

But, then, about a minute into the nearly three-minute video ad, the character of Coleman Sweeney collapses suddenly at a diner. He had been arguing heatedly with his waitress over something extremely minor on his bill and he just fell out of his chair and onto the floor – a deadly brain aneurysm.

The diner staff calls emergency services while the flustered waitress and another customer do CPR on the unconscious Mr. Sweeney.

As the ambulance team puts him on their gurney and begins working on him in the ambulance, the waitress sees his wallet on the floor, pulls out his driver's license, and notices that Coleman Sweeney was listed on his license as an organ donor.

At that point, the narrator who has been telling Coleman Sweeney's story throughout the ad, says this: “That was the day that Coleman went from bad neighbor to hero.

“You see his liver went to Stan, a father of two.

His heart went to Miranda, who went on to teach for 25 more years.

“And his tendons went to Staff Sergeant Donahue, who was able to walk again and would never need to be pushed across the street by his physical therapist.

And in a moment of small world irony, his corneas went to his 82-year-old next-door neighbor, so that she could finally watch her dog herself when he went outside.

“Yes, in life, Coleman was a bad neighbor – 365 days a year, 24/7. But, in death, well... let's just salute Coleman Sweeney and shout, 'You're not a bad neighbor anymore!’”¹

This video ad was produced by the non-profit organization Donate Life America and, in talking about it in my sermon; I do not intend to make a

1 Some pieces of narration modified from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeVLxcekEsw>.

statement about organ donation.

Frankly, I just love how the ad depicts a man who was a bad neighbor in life but who, for some mysterious reason, had made a rather generous choice at some point... and who, in death, found some measure of redemption from the many ways in which he'd been such a horrible neighbor while he was alive.

About a week-and-a-half ago, I drove by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church here in Bismarck and I couldn't help but notice the saying they had on one of their outdoor signs. The sign said, "God doesn't need your good works, but your neighbor does."

Isn't that so perfect? *"God doesn't need your good works, but your neighbor does."*

McCabe United Methodist Church, I am so grateful for the ways in which our neighbors – local and global – are the recipients of our good works!

In the two-plus years I've been here, we've given away tens of thousands of dollars to mission organizations like the Solar Oven Partners, the Spirit Lake Ministry Center, our local Abused Adult Resource Center, and Ministry on the Margins – another local resource site for folks who often fall between society's cracks.

We've also connected with many other missions and non-profits through our monthly One Thing.

Through One Thing, we've given generous donations of various necessities to places like the Ruth Meier's Hospitality House, Carrie's Kids, YouthWorks, Community Action, the Bismarck Emergency Food Pantry, the CROP Hunger Walk, and many more.

We've also sought to be good, helpful neighbors by serving The Banquet twice a year in recent years – something many of us did together just a couple of weeks ago... and we've put together hundreds upon hundreds of gift boxes for the children of our area reservations through the Shoebox Christmas program – our current One Thing mission.

When we give of our time and our resources to those organizations, we are offering our good works to our neighbors near and far – our local and *global* neighbors. Something to celebrate this World Communion Sunday weekend!

And, of course, this weekend we held our Neighborhood Block Party. So many McCabe folks came together to help plan and to provide hospitality during this event... Pastor Mark and I are deeply grateful! To see the people of this church come together for the sole purpose of extending welcoming hands and hearts to the people of our particular neighborhood... well, it was a beautiful thing.

I mean, I don't know if you've noticed this, but, when you walk around McCabe's particular neighborhood, you notice that we have a *fairly* diverse crew of folks living around us!

There are people of many colors, from many places, from all walks of life; in many ways, our neighborhood is a little snapshot of our global neighborhood... that we reached out to the people of our neighborhood in such a friendly, tangible way? Well, it was a snapshot of the kingdom of God being built, person by person, right here at 6th and Boulevard.

I apologize in advance for putting people on the spot, but, if you are in the room right now and you were at our Neighborhood Block Party, would you please stand? It doesn't matter if you came to help or if you just came to attend and have fun: please stand!

Those of you who were not able to be at the block party, I hope you will ask one of these folks about their experience at it. I had an absolutely *great* time connecting with our neighbors during our block party and I hope you'll hear that from these folks as well! (*Thank you, you can have a seat!*)

One of our United Methodist founding fathers, John Wesley, was known for saying, "The world is my parish." In saying that, he meant that everyone, everywhere was a child of God created to be in relationship with Jesus Christ and in relationship with the church.

In saying, "the world is my parish," John Wesley meant everyone in this wide world is worthy of God's love, worthy of connection... worthy of being considered a "neighbor." John Wesley said, "the world is my parish," but he could just as easily have said, "the world is my neighborhood!"

So, now, hear, again, St. Paul's words at the end of Galatians chapter three:

“So in Christ Jesus you are *all* children of God through faith, for *all* of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are *all* one in Christ Jesus.”

Before Jesus, the religious law drew some lines between people; those who were Jewish versus those who were not... those who were slave versus those who were free... those who were men versus those who were women.

The religious law made important distinctions between those groups of people saying one group was, essentially, *better* than the other... that one group was more “worthy” in God's eyes.

But, in Galatians chapter three, St. Paul points out that, in Jesus Christ, there is no distinction among believers; that whatever differences there are between us don't ultimately matter. That we are, in fact, *all of us* are worthy in God's eyes.

Beyond that, anyone who does not claim faith in Jesus Christ, is *also* worthy of our time and worthy of our hospitality.

As people of faith, we are here to share the life-giving, life-saving message of Jesus... and we share it in many and varied ways to the many and varied kinds of people with whom we share God's beautiful world – our global neighborhood.

When we celebrate Holy Communion this World Communion weekend, we are not only reenacting the last meal Jesus shared with his first disciples... when we celebrate Holy Communion, we are also practicing for the *heavenly banquet* – the holy table around which we will *all* sit when we dine with Christ in His eternal kingdom.

And that heavenly banquet table? It will be filled with our dearest loved ones, for sure... but it will also be filled with all sorts of folks we did not know and did not spend time with here on earth.

In a few moments, we'll all begin coming forward to receive the bread and cup of Holy Communion. As you come forward this World Communion day, look around and give thanks for the people with whom you share this holy meal, this holy table.

But, as you look around at who is *here*, think about those who are *not* here... those who are in our neighborhood who do not yet have a relationship with Jesus... and think also about our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.

This World Communion celebration provides a beautiful opportunity to give thanks to God for the fact that the world *is*, indeed, our neighborhood.

This World Communion celebration allows us to give thanks to God for the fact that, while there are differences between us, those differences don't ultimately matter.

And this World Communion celebration is a beautiful day to give thanks to God for loving us... because, by that holy love, we are blessed and strengthened to share love with our neighbors.

For every day truly *is* a beautiful day for a neighbor.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, send your Holy Spirit to breakthrough into our hearts and into McCabe United Methodist Church. Lead us to bold, new ways of sharing your love with one another, in our neighborhood, in Bismarck-Mandan, and beyond. May we look to you always as we build your heavenly kingdom on earth. We pray this in the powerful name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.