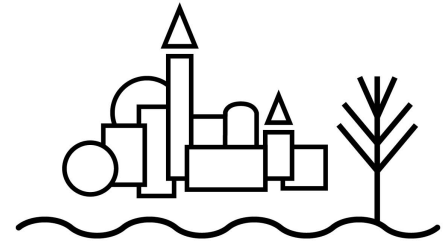


Connecting with My Neighbor in CRISIS

Luke 10:29-37



Laura (not her real name), a mother of two preschool children, came to our family literacy program, having only completed eighth grade. Her difficult early life had forced her to take on the adult responsibility of caring for herself and her family with no time or energy left for school. She earned her GED quickly, then went on to get her childcare certification through the local university. We wanted to hire her as a childcare teacher, but taking our job meant her earnings would drive her subsidized rent beyond what she would earn. She was trying to leave her increasingly abusive husband (whom we'll call Bill). She voluntarily worked for us for *no pay* for a year and got a restraining order against Bill. He responded by repeatedly terrorizing the family with a gun, but when he forced the children into his car at gunpoint, the police caught him. His contact with the children was restricted to "supervised visitation," but Laura knew the visits were neither supervised nor safe. I went to Child Services to offer testimony for Laura. I knew Laura was honest to the extreme, i.e. not willing to lie about her income to keep her rent low. Ultimately, Laura was vindicated and her children removed from all visitation requirements with Bill. Laura then met a good man who became the love of her life. They married, added two children to the family, and bought a home of their own. That was "long ago and far away." But Laura and I have remained connected, and she has even helped me in ministry. I am thankful I met my neighbor who has become my friend.

Reflections

1. Laura had many problems to work through over time. Discuss the *commitment* that being a neighbor can entail when the neighbor lives in our own community.
2. In this brief parable (esp. Luke 10:35), how does Jesus suggest that being a neighbor may entail more than a one-time kindness?
3. In Jesus' parable (and in the case of Laura) the folks who were trained to be helpers "passed by on the other side," leaving the hurting person to fend for themselves. What factors cause us to choose not to help one another? Can prejudice play a part?
4. Read Deuteronomy 10:15-19. What must it mean to "circumcise the foreskin of your hearts?" How can our own wounds help to soften (or "circumcise") our hearts?
5. Read 1 Peter 2:24. How did God humbly reach out to connect with and heal us? How can we, with Jesus, reach out to connect with our neighbors?

A Call to Action

1. Empower your local church: Ask your church session to participate in a community benevolence fund. This can be an ecumenical outreach or an individual church fund to help pay rent, utilities, or other emergency needs for persons in your community.
2. Talk to your local school counselor about the needs they see. You may be able to coordinate a school supply give-away, Thanksgiving or Christmas baskets, food or snack ministry, or help provide needed housewares or furniture.
3. Support *Still Waters Family Ministries*, Rev. Joyce Merritt, Director, or a similar ministry in your area. Consider this list of ways you might help:
 - Housing—do you have space to rent or share?
 - Funding for housing, utilities, emergency needs
 - Volunteers to organize housewares donations
 - Clothing, beds, and furniture for families
 - Cleaning products, paper goods, trash bags, and personal needs for families
 - Gift cards for gasoline assistance so they can travel to meetings and counseling sessions

Resources

1. Sacred Sparks: Rev. Lisa Cook, (Cumberland Presbyterian Church) - www.sacredsparksministry.wordpress.com
2. Look for the following in your area: Salvation Army and Room in the Inn

Prayer

God, kindle within our hearts today a flame of love for our neighbors in crisis. Give us eyes to see their pain. Give us ears to hear their cries. Give us wisdom to meet their needs. Give us courage to do your will. Amen.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Rev. Joyce Merritt, graduate of Memphis Theological Seminary, directs Still Waters Family Ministries, a Middle Tennessee CP outreach ministry located in Murfreesboro, Tenn. serving families at risk. Joyce has also been a high school science teacher, a pastor, and founder of Living Vine Outreach Ministry. Joyce and husband Tim have five children and live in Rockvale, Tenn. Contact information to support Still Waters Family Ministries: Still.waters.cp@gmail.com, 615.574.3047, 7120 Old Nashville Hwy, Murfreesboro, TN 37129