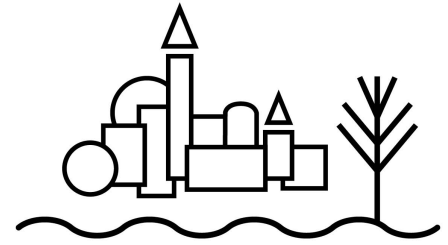


**Connecting with My Neighbor Experiencing
HOMELESSNESS
Luke 10:29-37**



I got the call one Sunday morning on the way to church, and with that call, my day's agenda changed completely. I found myself not headed to church as I had planned, but instead I re-routed to east Nashville to help a friend in need. Cecil had been found sleeping outside on a really cold morning, and the best we could tell, he had been there all night. Most likely, he fell asleep after having too much to drink the night before. A mutual friend, who also is forced to live outside due to a lack of affordable housing options, found Cecil and called me for help. Eventually, lots of people worked together to help Cecil get the emergency medical attention he needed that day. Cecil could have died, but luckily people saw Cecil as their 'neighbor' and he received the care and attention he so desperately needed. This story has a relatively happy ending. However, there is one thing that gives me pause about this story. Cecil was found sleeping outside a church that morning. No helpful assistance was offered from that church; they simply made a request that Cecil be removed from the property because "worship was about to start."

Reflections

1. Who are the marginalized and outcast "neighbors" of your community and what challenges do they face?
2. Consider "the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful" of your church family or faith community. How might they have responded if faced with a similar situation?
3. How is the church challenged by the complex and ever-changing needs from a community of neighbors with ever-increasing challenges?
4. From this real-life example, where might God have been found or experienced from the perspective of:
 - Cecil as "neighbor"
 - The mutual friend as "neighbor"
 - The church where Cecil was found as "neighbor"

A Call to Action

1. Find a way to increase your knowledge concerning people experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty in your community and explore ways you can serve those "neighbors."
2. Commit to intentionally and consistently remember these "neighbors" in your prayers each day.

Resources

1. <http://nationalhomeless.org/references/need-help/>
2. www.sacredsparksministry.wordpress.com

Prayer

Loving God, please help us to reflect the love, mercy, and grace you have for us toward each and every neighbor we encounter. Help us to recognize and respond with love to your sacred spark which burns inside all of creation. Amen.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Rev. Lisa Cook worked in the corporate world for more than 20 years as a Sr. Project Manager for AT&T, before answering the call to ordained ministry. Lisa graduated in 2008 from Bethel University in McKenzie, Tenn., with a B.A. in Business and Organizational Development. She then attended Memphis Theological Seminary earning her Masters of Divinity in 2013. Lisa was ordained by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and called to serve as a street chaplain to those experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty in Nashville, Tenn., in January, 2014.

Lisa serves this unique church / community through **Sacred Sparks Ministry**, an outreach of Nashville Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The purpose of the ministry is to meet men and women experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty where they are, and to offer a ministry of presence, love, service, pastoral care, outreach, and relationships.