**Walk With Your God and Your Neighbor**

As I read the readings for this weekend, I couldn’t help but wonder what type of neighbor I have been over the years. I immediately thought about my neighbor when I was a young boy, Mr. Couillard. Mr. Couillard was a gruff old man who would often chase the neighborhood kids off his lawn. For some reason, he and I got along. I can remember many sunny afternoons we would sit on lawn chairs on his driveway listening to the Cubs games on the radio. He would tell me many stories of his life and give me advice about how to avoid the pitfalls in mine. As I look back today, I realize that even though I had no idea, I was being a good neighbor to Mr. Couillard. He just needed someone to listen.

As I moved forward, I thought about those in my college dormitory. Twenty-eight college aged men living on one wing of a dorm. Maybe I should just move on!

When Lori and I bought our first home, Lorraine lived next door. Lorraine was an elderly widow and had difficulty doing some things like snow blowing, lawn mowing and other assorted household tasks. Lori and I would help her out as often as possible. I’ll say, she made really good cookies! When we sold that house, we sold it to friends and told them they had to take care of Lorraine.

Where we live now we have made good friends with one of our neighbors. The other neighbors on the court are really for the most part strangers.

Why do I tell you about these relationships?

Well, as I thought about whether I was a good neighbor to those in my life, ***I realized I needed some work.*** The good neighbor Jesus is talking about in today’s Gospel is not just our neighbors in close proximity to where we live. It’s not just doing some snow blowing or lawn care. It’s not about being able to sit on the front porch in the summer and share a beer. ***It’s really about bringing that neighbor to Christ.*** All of the neighborly things I described above are nice, and we should help out our neighbors. But, we also need to be that disciple to our neighbors, whether they are our next-door neighbor or the person we meet in the grocery store.

As we approach Election Day, I can’t help but wonder what type of neighborhood we are living in today. Everything seems so divisive. I can’t even watch television right now because the political ads are so numerous and so contentious. Instead of being able to have a respectable discussion about any subject today, it seems the discussion turns into a name calling session and hostility.

Why is that?

I think it’s because we don’t have that ***Mr. Couillard*** time anymore with others. People don’t just sit and talk anymore. We don’t know who our neighbors are because we are too worried about all the busyness in our lives. Jesus wants us to really get to know our neighbors, whether at home, school, work or at church. If we take the time to know and understand each other, I trust we can turn this world around.

However, we cannot just change the world by lecturing ***at*** people! We can’t tell them how to live their lives. We need to go beyond this. In the Cursillo movement there is a saying, ***“Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ.”*** If we really want to be the neighbor Jesus is talking about in the Gospel, we need to live this saying.

The beauty of today’s Gospel is that in the paraphrasing by the scribe of the words Jesus recited, and then adding these words, **"*This is much more important than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*"** Clearly, the scribe gets it, and Jesus recognizes this as he commends and encourages him by saying, ***"You are not far from the kingdom of God."***

In these two commandments are the truth to our eternal freedom. Freedom not to attempt to be our own god, but the freedom to worship the true God. This is the gift to live in the freedom to love our neighbor as Christ has loved us.

In both commandments in today’s Gospel, we hear Jesus teaching us of unselfish love. ***What a gift of word and deed.*** This is the gift God intended for all of us. To live in relationship with the God of all creation and those whom He created in his own image, ourselves and our neighbor.

I would like to finish with one last story. Earlier this week, my nephew, who lived with us from 2015 to 2016 stopped by and wanted to know if I could marry him and his fiancé. I explained to him that I could only marry a couple if at least one of them was Catholic. The conversation ended at that. You see, my nephew was baptized but has been away from the church for a long time. His fiancé is in a similar position.

Two days later, he stopped by to ask what he needed to do so he could be married in the Catholic Church? I asked him why he wanted to get married in the church. His response was beautiful. He said, ***“My faith has become very important to me and I want my marriage to take place in the presence of God.”*** During the time he lived with us, Lori and I would often talk about our faith and why it is important to us. We never pushed it on him. We were just there to answer questions and give input when he asked. We gave him information about going through RCIA to come into full communion with the Catholic Church. We are just starting the process here at St. Gabriel. I think the Holy Spirit is hard at work here?

He told us he was going to think about RCIA and get back to us. I would like to think that he saw how important our faith is to Lori and me and he wants that in his life. Sometimes, we just need to walk with our neighbor. Not push like a bulldozer. But be there to walk with them and support them.

I leave all of us with a challenge today. When we come in contact with our worldly neighbors, let’s walk with them on their journey. Let’s not judge them where they are on their journey. Let’s just walk with them, where they are, not where we want them to be, but where they really are. Remember, ***“Make a friend, be a Friend, Bring a friend to Christ.”***