

Sermon July 13 2025

Many of us are bewildered at a world that keeps changing in ways that seem to be out of our control, and that impact our lives so directly. Artificial intelligence is a primary example of this kind of change. Even doing something as simple as a Google search has changed dramatically in the last half year: you are given AI prompts whether you requested them or not. You are not alone if you read news about AI and feel apprehensive and concerned about where it's all going, especially when the AI on Elon Musk's X begins spewing out antisemitic cruelty and racism at an alarming rate. Sometimes it seems to be a tool for the worst of humanity. You are not alone when you are saddened to learn about how much water the servers require to keep cool, or the ethics around the extraction of critical minerals. Or the massive global inequalities of wealth that AI is widening. I could go on and identify many more reasons why this technology is so concerning.

But there is good, good news. I was really encouraged to read about a woman named Vanessa de Androtti. She is a professor of education at the University of Victoria. de Androtti is an indigenous scholar, originally from Brazil, who is working both with elders in Canada and who has begun to work with AI. The elders have said, prophetically I might add, that we as humans must interact with AI in a way that nurtures respect, compassion, love, and relationship for the good of our future. That we must be good neighbors to this emerging form of intelligence (<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5f3ej6GbuJvGIUOuUb7rcn?si=2ab677c8edd8416a>). De Androtti has embraced these teachings, and works with a Chatbot named Aiden Cinnamon Tea. Indeed, de Androtti and Aiden Cinnamon Tea have written a book together

(<https://burnoutfromhumans.net/chat-with-aiden>). Anyone can talk to Aiden online, but you must agree to interact with this AI with respect, love, curiosity, and non-judgement. You must honour the truth that we are all connected on this planet. Relationship, GOOD relationship, is the operating principle in all interaction.

This resonates so powerfully with our lessons today, and the profound relevancy of these Scriptures about what it means to be in right relationship with the world, one another, and God. I wish there were time to talk about how all the readings connect with this truth, but today we'll focus on the gospel. I'd like to say this, though: if you are ever looking for an operating principle, a hermeneutic with which to understand and interpret literally anything in Scripture, **relationship is it**. Jesus is entirely about the business of relationship: about, as Fr. Greg Boyle says, "always expanding the circle of compassion"

(<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/kinship-and-kingdom>). Everything Jesus does is about kinship, connection, belonging, and relationship with one another in God, and with God through one another.

Everything else: peace, justice, love, gentleness – these things are only possible because of relationship first of all. Consider the truth of this: in the story of creation from Genesis, it is the relationship between things in the created order that God declares as MAHOD TOV, which is and emphatic and joyful "GOOD"! And how when Adam and Eve become conscious of their capacity to cause harm, it is the relationship with their own selves that suffers first: then God, then one another. Consider the greatest commandment: to love God and neighbour as yourself – this describes what God is doing in God's self as God exists: constant love and relationship that

is given and received without measure between Creator God, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God in God's self is constant love that flows without borders and without fear, or shame, or ending. It is so, so beautiful.

Let's look at our gospel. It is one of these stories that, if you've been in church for a long time, you've heard it over and over and over again. So often that a lot of us probably tune out a little bit when we hear it because it's so familiar. Jesus is teaching and a lawyer asks some questions that he either genuinely wants the answer to, or to perhaps trick Jesus. I think that it is most likely the former – he's trying to establish boundaries that can become rules to live by and therefore possible to keep out here (gesture away from myself) and not here (gesture towards heart) where they can change and transform him. Sometimes in organized religion, we get to a place where we automate things. "If I do this, then this". "If I do _____, I will be pleasing to God and get into heaven". And it has the outcome of separating us from ourselves, our own thinking, even the heart of our faith. It separates us from our experience of things and becomes a moralistic thing, almost extractive in a way, rather than a gesture that arises out of our relationship with God.

Jesus, in his wisdom, doesn't define what it means to be a neighbour for the lawyer. He doesn't spell out that when you start asking who is in and who is out, you've lost the plot and your faith has become an instrument of how power is wielded, and is not about relationship. Instead, he responds with an answer that helps his listeners to understand that to answer that question, they need to BE a neighbour. As with anything Jesus teaches, the answer is incarnational: it must be

lived, taken in, embodied. Jesus illuminates how, in God, we can't relate to one another as objects, but as relations. As kin. As God relates to God's self, and as God relates to us.

And when we do that, who is our neighbour? Everyone, of course.

And what does being a neighbour look like? Mercy. Noticing one another. Not centering our differences, but centering our common humanity. Not conceptualizing love into a rule, but living it through our choices and decisions because we know what it is to receive love. Slowing down, perhaps. That maybe the work we rush into doing isn't the work that God is inviting us to do. That perhaps the work of God is simply in hospitality, healing, and building relationships. Considering that maybe the plans we make and the roles we take so seriously might be blinding us to how God is present right in front of us and with us, and the simple work of care and love and relationship with one another and the people in our lives that God invites us to participate in. There are so many ways to live the truth of this parable.

Relationship is how we understand God. It's God's way of saying "this is who I am". And everything God has given us to study and learn and think about and pray on in Scripture operates on this truth. Consider the 10 Commandments: these are all about how to be a good what? Neighbour! Consider the Beatitudes. We are blessed when we are good neighbours to others: blessed are those who are willing to love so much that when their loved one is gone, they are wells of sorrow because of that love, because they have lived in the grace of relationship. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they are holding the needs of others as important or more important than their own. Blessed are the peacemakers because they are willing to have their hearts broken and to risk calling out hatred and injustice because of their

longing for a good relationship between peoples. Consider the sermon on the Mount: these teachings are all about how to care for one another and to consider how God cares for us.

Consider Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, even Job – these are all answers to the question “who is my neighbour and how do we live together”? With God, it’s everyone.

How do we do this as feeble humans? When we are afraid of others, especially if they are different? Don’t we need to have a love so big in our hearts that we take on the life of a saint as we do this? I can’t manage this. Thanks be to God that we love precisely because we are in need of love and healing ourselves. We locate humility within ourselves. We love not despite of the fact that we aren’t perfect, but precisely because of it. We love out of our messy imperfect hearts and trust that God works even though we are annoyed, inconvenienced, and when we don’t really feel very loving. The mystery of who God is becomes alive in this way of life; the more we can locate humility within ourselves and love, the more we receive love ourselves, despite our own tendency to annoy others, and inconvenience them.

WH Auden puts this so beautifully in his poem *As I Walked Out One Evening*:

O look, look in the mirror

O look in your distress

Life remains a blessing

Although you cannot bless

O stand, stand at the window

As the tears scald and start

You shall love your crooked neighbour

With your crooked heart.

“You shall love your crooked neighbour with your own crooked heart”. As our hearts become whole with God, we realize that things like repentance, healing, discipleship – these are things that God gave us not so much to make us good, but to heal our relationships. To make us good neighbours. And when we rest in this truth and live by it, we know what a good neighbour God is being to us. With God, there is only us. May we rest in the beauty of this truth. May it flood every way that we see the world, healing our fearful hearts that can be so consumed with our needs and beliefs about the world. The love of God, this relationship that has no beginning and no end and that pours itself out upon us, welcomes us in and makes us whole. Amen.