

Faith Bible Study Guide
For the Week of March 9, 2025 - First Sunday in Lent
“Everything [In] Between: Stranger & Neighbor”



Be still [2 Minutes]: As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

CENTERING WORDS: *Never Met a Stranger*

When we talk about God, we say
she's never met a stranger.
She makes friends at the airport.
She waves to babies in the check-out line.
When we talk about God, we say
she'll leave the porch light on.
She'll have warm bread in the oven.
She'll have all the time in the world.
When we talk about God, we say
she'll look you in the eye.
She'll love you as you are.
She'll call you by your name.
When we talk about God,
we never have to talk about
which side of the road she might walk down.
Wherever you are,
that's where she'll be.

OPENING PRAYER: *Prayer for illumination*

Gracious God,
We love to ask you questions.
We love to throw our wonderings at the sky,
to bring our curiosity to your feet,
to examine, beseech, and imagine all day
long.
But when the answers come,
we don't always like what we hear.
Awaken a curiosity in us.
Awaken a penchant for listening,
and make room in our spirits for your Word
to land.
With hope we question,
we wonder,
we dream,
we listen.
Amen

Be the Word Scripture Lesson: Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.^[a] “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29 But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

L: The Word of God for all people

P: Thanks be to God

Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]

1. Take a deep breath. *How is it with your soul?*
2. Who have you put into the category of the “stranger”?



3.

Be rooted: [Bible Study]

The series at a glance

This series is inspired by the Narrative Lectionary and sequentially follows the Gospel of Luke from chapter 9–24.

Lent

ASH WED.	1 ST SUN IN LENT	2 ND SUN IN LENT	3 RD SUN IN LENT	4 TH SUN IN LENT	5 TH SUN IN LENT
intention & action	stranger & neighbor	faith & works	rest & growth	lost & found	righteousness & mercy
Luke 9:51-62 (Jesus sets out for Jerusalem)	Luke 10:25-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)	Luke 10:38-42 (Mary & Martha host Jesus)	Luke 13:6-9 (Parable of the fig tree)	Luke 15:1-7 (Parable of the lost sheep)	Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus greets Jesus)

Holy week

PALM / PASSION SUNDAY	MAUNDY THURS	GOOD FRIDAY	EASTER SUNDAY
shouting & silence	power & humility	acceptance & resistance	grief & hope
Luke 19:29-40 (Jesus enters Jerusalem)	Luke 22:1-27 (Last Supper)	Luke 23:32-49 (Jesus dies alongside a penitent thief)	Luke 24:1-12 (The women grieve and Peter runs to the tomb)

Focal Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

Theme Connections:

This parable begins and ends with the question, “Who is my neighbor?” and the answer is surprisingly, “the stranger.” The Samaritan, whose place of worship and customs are different from the lawyer who questions Jesus, is both a stranger and a neighbor to the man who was beaten and left in a ditch. In our world, many of our physical neighbors are strangers to us, and many of our neighbors—those closest to us—feel like strangers in divisive political climates. If we align our intentions and actions, then maybe we need to reconsider who we label as “stranger,” and ask ourselves if we have acted as good neighbors.

Commentary on Luke 10:25-37 by Rev. Jeff Chu

To love is what it takes to truly live

In his last speech before being assassinated, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about the story of the Good Samaritan.⁴

King had visited the Jericho Road in 1959. He saw its twists and felt its turns as it wound through the hills and sank into a valley outside Jerusalem. Along the way were so many potential hiding places for robbers to lie in wait, ready to ambush weary travelers. “I’m going to tell you what my imagination tells me” about the priest and the Levite, he said. “It’s possible those men were afraid.” Perhaps, he suggested, they fearfully asked themselves, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?”

The Good Samaritan, King said, “reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’” Then he urged his listeners to imagine themselves on contemporary Jericho Roads. Could they— would they—ask that same question when they saw others struggling?

King’s speech offered a master class in wrestling with complexity. He empathized with the Levite and the priest—how utterly human to be fearful on the Jericho Road! He also praised the Samaritan’s “dangerous unselfishness.”

Another layer to King’s complexity: Privately, he had misgivings about the story. “I of course like and respect the Good Samaritan, but I don’t want to be a Good Samaritan,” King told a friend. “I am tired of seeing people battered and bruised and bloody. . . . I want to pave the Jericho Road, add street lights to the Jericho Road, make the Jericho Road safe for passage by everybody.”⁵

King’s reading rebukes tidy delineations between us and them—and I’m going to tell you what my imagination told me when I pondered it: We’re all fellow travelers. Some might be more neighborly than others. But there are no strangers in this story.

Vulnerability appears in manifold ways in one short passage: The Samaritan’s risky mercy. The humanity of the priest and the Levite. Also, the innkeeper’s trust; he takes a small down payment, believing the promise of more. There’s the boldness of the legal expert too; he instigates this whole thing by asking a testing question—and it’s quintessentially Jesus to meet even the self-righteous by staying in conversation.

Candor invites us to see ourselves in each of these characters. Some days, I covet vindication of my own goodness. Other days, I have only enough courage to scuttle down the road, afraid of what might lurk in the shadows. On my better days, I’ll meet others in good faith, believing their promises. On my best days, I’ll encounter the world mercifully, staying tenderhearted enough to be “moved with compassion,” even on roads that fill others with fear.

I suspect Jesus recognizes all these aspects of what it means to be human. I imagine, too, that he extends us the same grace he offered the legal expert, remaining ever-patient and always eager to remind us: To love is what it takes to truly live.

4 An annotated transcript of King’s final speech can be found here: [nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/02/us/king-mlk-last-sermon-annotated.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/02/us/king-mlk-last-sermon-annotated.html)

5 Author John Hope Bryant recounts this conversation between Rev. Dr. MLK, Jr. and ambassador Andrew Young in his article, “Fixing the Jericho Road,” published on HuffPost, May 25, 2011. [huffpost.com/entry/fixing-the-ericho-road_b_422612](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fixing-the-ericho-road_b_422612)

1. Consider how this parable begins. A lawyer, part of the elite, educated, and literate class, “tests” Jesus with a probing question, addressing him simply as “teacher,” instead of as “Lord.” Together, they discuss what is written in the Torah about the greatest commandment. When the lawyer asks who his neighbor is, Jesus responds with a story where the hero is a Samaritan, upending the lawyer’s

expectations and entire legal framework.

- Imagine the lawyer's motivations, objectives, and fears. Imagine his reaction. Can you identify with him in any way?
2. In their commentary on Luke, Bible scholars, Levine and Witherington III title this story "The parable of the man who fell among the robbers." They argue that Jesus' audience and Luke's readers would have primarily identified with the one in the ditch, waiting for rescue.
 - When you imagine yourself in this position, who do you see rushing toward you to tend to your wounds?
 - How does that make you feel?
 3. Samaritans were (and still are) a group within the Jewish faith, not outside it. This places the Samaritans and Jews as neighbors, not necessarily strangers.
 - Are there people or groups within the larger umbrella of your faith family that you struggle to have compassion for? Why?
 - What is the source of—or reason for—that lack of compassion?
 4. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is about 17 miles long and drops over 3,000 feet in elevation in a steep decline. The route was a common commute, especially for priests and Levites who could not afford to live in Jerusalem and would be returning home after a trip to the Temple. Though common, the road was dangerous, often filled with bandits. In his commentary, Rev. Chu quotes MLK, Jr.'s sentiments about the very real fear the priest and the Levite may have experienced when considering helping the man: "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?"
 - Have you ever been in a situation where your fear kept you from helping someone?
 - Do you empathize with the priest and Levite, or see yourself in them?
 5. Consider MLK, Jr.'s words: "I want to pave the Jericho Road, add street lights to the Jericho Road, make the Jericho Road safe for passage by everybody."
 - Do you share his frustration?
 - What are examples of Jericho Roads in your own midst?
 - Are there ways you can participate in changing the systems that make these places unsafe?
 6. Note the series of actions the Samaritan takes: he notices the one beaten and comes closer. He is moved with deep compassion, seeing the man as deserving of care. He bandages and treats his wounds (sharing his own resources to do so). He places the man on his animal and transports him to a safe place. The next day, he pays the innkeeper to continue offering care. Before he leaves, he promises to return and check on both the man and the innkeeper, repaying any additional expenses.
 - As a community, could your church emulate any or all of these actions for the neighbors in your own midst?
 - Are there particular actions within these examples that your church does well (for example: identifying and humanizing the vulnerable, providing immediate relief or transportation, partnering with other caregivers, offering financial resources, etc.)?
 - Do you partner with other organizations to participate in a full spectrum of compassionate caregiving?

Be transformed: [Faith in Action]



Neighbors

by Steve Prince

Inspired by Luke 10:25-37

Ink on paper

Each individual carries generations within them, made up of billions of people who have occupied this earth before us. We have an individual and collective responsibility to be good stewards (Good Samaritans) of our bodies, neighbors, and communities, rooted in love. Every day we make a dance of life and death—celebrating the entrance and exit of life, the progression of age and maturity, and the expansion of our tent, grafting to people who share our blood and our beliefs. We are the structures, those temporal buildings that weather the storms, that creak and wither away daily, but are fortified by our relationships to each other and with the sharing of the good news planted by the Heavenly Father. This dance is an open profession of our vow to live by God's commandments and find a way to collectively preserve the truth of our origin while moving as one communal body into an untouched future. —Steve Prince

Prompts for contemplation

- Observe the figures' posture and movement. Do you see connection, conflict, or both? How does this reflect your own relationships?
- Focus on the textures and shading. What story might these elements tell about resilience or fragility?
- Pay attention to the empty spaces around the figures. What do these spaces evoke for you?
- Imagine yourself as part of this scene. What role would you play in this dance of connection, tension, and movement?

Prayers & Concerns / Announcements:



- **Lenten Opportunities - Soul Care Mini-Retreats (intention & action), GBCS (faith & works), and thoughts this week for (neighbor & stranger)**
- **Using the Lenten Devotional and Prayer Cards ~ includes songs, poems, prayers, and deeper understanding of the weekly messages**
- **Easter Egg donations: filled Easter eggs**

Joys & Celebrations:

- Rev. Derek and Pam Nakano (3/4)
- Jordan Sasaki (3/25)

For Healing and Wholeness:

- Diane Ueda-Banda
- Harry Lum
- Audrey Goto
- Sayaka Shigeta's MOM
- Fred Oshiro
- Masako Akiyama
- Florence Uchida
- Alvena Fukuhara*
- Victoria DelaTorre*
- Austin Maeda
- Nancy Matsushima
- Mary Tamura
- Harriet Tateyama*
- Brian Okumura (Sandy Ueyuente's brother)
- Glenn & Millie Shimizu
- Larry Takumi
- Yoshi Yamasaki
- Pastor Sid Wilson (Walteria UMC)
- Claretta Foster
- Ryonos
- Maria Arevalo
- Baby Joel

- Sachiko (Matsuyama's dog)
- Rev. Mike Hiranuma
- Chris Medeiros

Life Transitions:

- Chic Miyake
- Bess Kawamura
- Sumi Horii
- Jack Hamada
- Ryonos
- Emma Horiuchi, moving to San Diego to be closer to family by December
- Doris Kato, living in transitional boarding care
- Rev Harry Fujimoto's Transition to Japan
- Life transition for the Minei family, Dave & Soyoung Minei as they are transitioning to new jobs in Texas.

Absent from the Body, Present with the Lord:

- Hannah Yamamoto (February 12, 2025) - Charter Member - RSVP - April 12, 11am
- Kanji Sahara (February 15, 2025) - JACL, Wall at Columbia Park - RSVP - March 8, 3pm
- George Toya (February 15, 2025) -

- March 29 (2pm, Green Hills),
430/5pm Reception
- George Nakakura (November 2024)
 - Melissa Utsuki (March 1, 2025) - 10am
 - Amy Peters (Kim Foster's cousin) -

- 101 years old
- Rev. Lydia Waters - March 7, Crossroads UMC, 11am
 - Fumi Kitahara (Jason's friend; Asian Camp)

And Know that He is God: Affirmation of faith

Church, if God asked you, "Who is your neighbor?"
what would you say?

**We would say,
every child, every person,
every weeping willow,
and every morning lark.
Every freckled face,
every wrinkled pair of hands,
every tail-wagging dog,
and every crisp ripe apple.
We would say,
we are connected—
to one another, to all of God's creation.
There are no strangers in God's house.
We are all family here.**

I think God would delight in that answer. For it is said,
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul,

with all your strength,

with all your mind,

and you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

We believe. Help our unbelief. Amen.

Further reading & research:

Read “Knowing Our Neighbors” by Richard Rohr. Center for Action and Contemplation. May 28, 2024. cac.org/daily-meditations/knowing-our-neighbors/

(Note: In this meditation, Richard Rohr quotes Rabbi Sharon Brous, drawing on her work to dignify every human being. He writes: “What would it mean to build a society in which every person is treated as an image of the Divine? How would this affect our relationships with our neighbors, our coworkers, the stranger lying beneath the stained blankets and trash outside Starbucks? Wouldn’t it compel us to recast the cultures of our schools, organizations, and faith communities? How would it impact health care, education, public policy?... How would it transform law enforcement and criminal justice systems—where today judgment is too often rendered based on whether a person is Black or white, rich or poor, rather than guilty or innocent?”)

Read “How do you build trust between a community and its immigrants? Nonprofit uses four steps to turn strangers into neighbors,” by Camila Molina. Faith & Leadership. February 18, 2020. faithandleadership.com/how-do-you-build-trust-between-community-and-its-immigrant-s-nonprofit-uses-four-steps-turn

(Note: This article features the work of FaithAction International House. It is a faith-based nonprofit with a four-step Stranger to Neighbor model, a program designed to challenge the stereotypes of immigrants and foster trust between a community’s longtime citizens and its newcomers.)