

“WON’T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?”
“Loving Our Neighbor and Our Neighborhood”

Fred Rogers when interviewed about his opening song “Won’t you be my neighbor?” he said, “Well, I supposed it’s an invitation. It’s an invitation for somebody to be close to you.” In the Christian tradition, when Jesus is asked, “Who is my neighbor” through story and actions Jesus pointed out that everyone is our neighbor, particularly those in need...” During the month of August we are celebrating the years we have been neighbors to people through our television ministry. For over forty years, First United Methodist Church has been reaching beyond its doors to people across the state and now across the world. It helps us be a good neighbor to those both far and near. We continue to work loosely with the Good Neighbor experiment written by the staff of SoCe life. The next few weeks we will find a way to look at the key ingredients of being a good neighbor: Abundance, Relationship and Joy. There will be a challenge each day and the prayer we share will be the same each week for this sermon series and taken from the curriculum from SoCe Life. One of this week’s scriptures comes from Jeremiah 29. As a church, verses 4 through 7 have been our prayer focus for 2018. “Pray for the welfare of the city where I have sent you...because your future depends on its welfare.” Praying for our neighbors and working for their welfare is part of being a good neighbor. I continue to be grateful that we are neighbors and brothers and sisters in Christ. Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Loving Our Neighbor and Our Neighborhood”**

Prayer for the Week

God of Connection, open our eyes to discover your treasures hidden among our neighbors. Open our ears to listen deeply to their stories. Open our hands to receive the giftedness they bring into our lives. God of Creativity, stir our minds with curiosity about this wondrous world. Lead our feet forward, moving only at the speed of trust. Free our hearts to join the work you are already doing in our neighborhoods. God of Compassion, plant the seeds of patience among us, as we learn to love our neighbor as ourselves. Plant the seeds of grace among us, so failure leads us to your love. Plant the seeds of community, that we would discover your kingdom among us. Amen. The Good Neighbor Experiment curriculum copyright ©SoCe Life

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, August 20, 2018 Jeremiah 29: 4-7

These verses have been part of our prayer focus as a church community and teams for 2018. The people and exile were being challenged to pray and work for the welfare of their oppressors. In the words of John Wesley, they were “to do good and no harm to the city to which they had been exiled.” Plant gardens, have children, prosper where you are, not where you want to be. These words must have been difficult for those who just wanted to go home, to leave Babylon and be done with “those” people. Jeremiah says that God isn’t done with those people or with Israel. The welfare and future of Israel depended on how Israel worked for the good of those who had destroyed their land and brought them into exile. Wow! These words are as challenging for us today as they were for those who first heard them. Find hope, find faith and find new life where you are right now. *Does your neighborhood feel like a place of exile? Does the church? How can we, pray for downtown Wichita, for the homeless across the street, for the people at home, at work and at school? What one thing will you do today to work for the welfare of your neighborhood.*

Tuesday, August 21, 2018 Jeremiah 29: 4-9

Putting verses 8 and 9 in context, there were many who were encouraging the people to be in despair. They were saying things that were not true and causing discontent. It is so easy to focus on what is wrong or bad, but the prophet Jeremiah was asking the people on God’s behalf to pay attention to where they were. They were not leaving anytime soon. “Put down roots, prosper, plant things that will take more than one season to grow, do good where you are.” In some ways, finding blessing where they were, was the only hope they had of finding and experiencing God, in a strange land and strange place. “Bloom where you are planted,” the old saying goes. The only way to do that, is to trust that God can “abundantly accomplish far more than can ask or imagine.” *How can ignoring the negative, and focusing on our neighbors change our perception about our neighborhood? Today, list 2 or 3 blessings that you can share as you work for the good or welfare of your neighborhood.*

Wednesday, August 22, 2018 Jeremiah 29: 10-14

Here’s what Israel really wanted to hear: that there was future, with hope; that God would bring healing and restoration and bring them home. Perhaps part of the point of working for the welfare or good of Babylon was a way of being and practicing being a good neighbor. If they could do that with their enemies, their oppressors, how much more successful would they be at loving God and their neighbors when they returned home? How hard it must have been to celebrate the successes and the prosperity of those who had conquered them? And yet, God said, work for their success, their welfare, and you will find your own. You will be blessed. How does that work in your life? How do you do good to “those who hate you or oppress you?” How do you work for good for those who make you uncomfortable, for those you are uncertain about, for those you don’t know? A good neighbor finds way to interact and find the gifts of each person they meet. *Today, prayer over this scripture, and trust that God has a future planned for you and then meet one new person, at church, or at work or in your neighborhood. In their welfare, you will find God’s blessing.*

Thursday, August 23, 2018 Ephesians 4: 1-3

In this passage, Paul focuses on the main theme, “the church is the body of Christ.” Studies from our Jeremiah passage points to God’s call to be good neighbors. “Live as people worthy of the call received from God.” “Conduct yourselves with humility and gentleness and accept each other with love.” How is that different than working for the welfare of the place you have been sent, in its welfare you will find your own? In Ephesus, like many places Paul was ministering, there were Jews and Gentiles, slaves and non-slaves, rich and poor, men and women and a variety of cultural backgrounds, languages and understandings. They had to find a way to work through the differences, to work for each other’s welfare and find the unity of the Spirit as their own welfare. This unity and love was a witness to what God was doing in Jesus and that Spirit was binding them together as one. The humility and gentleness and patience were the vehicles through which they could prosper together and build a future with hope together. What differences or challenges you to work together for the unity of Christ? Is it cultural, or a language difference? It is a political or philosophical difference. *Today, find one person to have a conversation with that doesn’t agree with you on any given topic. Learn to listen, to accept that person (without necessarily accepting their viewpoint.) In the words of Jeremiah, finding a way to work for their good is a way for you to work for your own good.*

Friday, August 24, 2018 Ephesians 4: 4-7

“One body, one spirit, just as you were called to one hope,” Paul writes. Jeremiah writes, “I know the plans I have for you, to give you a future with hope.” God is in the midst of life, offering hope in all of it. God in over all, through all and in all. When we think about the question, “won’t you be my neighbor?” we are often drawn to offer ourselves as neighbor to people we like or are like us. In Christ, we are one body, one faith, one baptism and we don’t get to choose our neighbors any more than the Israelites got to choose the Babylonians as their neighbors. It is God at work who is “over all, through all and in all.” *How is God calling you to live out the hope you are given? How is God expanding you as a neighbor and calling you to live out love as a neighbor? Invite someone new to be your neighbor by inviting them to church or to a church function.*