

“WON’T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?”
“Where Else is Joy and Life?”

Upon being interviewed about his opening song “Won’t you be my neighbor?” Fred Rogers said, “Well, I suppose it’s an invitation. It’s an invitation for somebody to be close to you.” During the month of August we are celebrating the years we have been neighbors to people through our television ministry. For forty two 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 and during these weeks we will find a way to look at the key ingredients of being a good neighbor: Abundance, Relationship and Joy. This week we finish the sixth chapter of John. There are not easy words to read or think about when we are pondering the ingredients of Joy. And yet, in the words of Peter, “Where else will we find Eternal Life?” As Paul writes to the Ephesians, “In Christ we have bold and confident access to God through faith in him.” May this week we find joy, in highs and lows, successes and failures, in our relationship with Christ and each other. Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Where Else is Joy and Life?”**

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 27, 2018 John 6: 60-63

The sixth chapter of John begins with the feeding of the five thousand. When people want more bread, Jesus shares the statement “I am the Bread of Life.” The religious leaders begin debating with Jesus and become increasingly uncomfortable with the imagery of “eating flesh and drinking blood.” If taken literally, Jesus’ words are hard and the imagery repulsive. People begin to leave, because Jesus’ teaching is difficult and hard to understand. Jesus counters that his words are words of “spirit and life.” Jesus states “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” “Many of his

disciples who hear this said, "This message is harsh. Who can hear it?" Jesus is inviting people to change; change their hearts, change their lives. Doing so, would mean people need to change their understanding. Jesus claims to be the Bread of Life and the One whom God has sent to change the world. AS the pressure rose, I wonder if there wasn't a sense of failure all around. The huge amount of disciples felt like Jesus was living up to what they expected and Jesus was watching as those same disciples didn't want to wrestle with something different or commit more deeply to God. *Can you think of times when you were upset, or unwilling to wrestle with hard scriptures? Are there times when where God was asking you to go somewhere or do something that was too hard or too uncertain? What happened in those moments? Today, pray that God opens your heart and spirit to hang fast to your love of Christ and faith in God even in the midst of times that are hard.*

Tuesday, August 28, 2018 John 6: 63-66

The words of Jesus are spirit and life, but many struggled to believe, or didn't believe at all. Jesus knew and understood how hard his words must have seemed, and still seem. The healings, the miracles, those excited the crowds and the many disciples outside of his inner circle. His push was for those disciples to deepen in their relationship with God, to participate in what God would be doing in the world through Jesus. When Jesus pointed to himself as the way, people turned back and quit following him. Note, these are people who described themselves as disciples. Probably for many reasons, they decided the risk, the cost, the responsibility was more than they had bargained for. In terms of neighboring, perhaps this was not what they wanted. The abundance and joy they experienced was fine as long as nothing was expected in return. Following Jesus is a call to commit heart, mind and soul to God. In committing first to God, then we are called to commit ourselves and our resources to our neighbor. No wonder many turned away. Following Jesus is hard, is a bit scary and certainly requires a deep faith that God is abundantly able to do far more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians.) *Have you ever turned away from Christ? What brought you back? Today, ask God to rekindle your love for Christ in your heart and spirit. Like a good friend and neighbor, spend time and draw near to God that God might draw near to you.*

Wednesday, August 29, 2018 John 6: 66-69

These may contain some of the most poignant words of Jesus, "do you also wish to go away?" Many, many others had left, only the twelve remained. These words do not imply condemnation for those who chose another path. The words imply that the disciples may choose to leave. Do you wonder if Jesus grew weary of being misinterpreted? Do you wonder how he felt after being questioned and debated biblically and theologically again and again? "Do you also wish to go away?" is a question that can haunt each person. Perhaps in 2018, believers don't intentionally walk away, but the busyness of the calendar can rule our heart, mind and our time. Peter, blurts out "where can we go? We have come to believe and know you are the Holy One of God." In Jesus, I believe we see the face to God and the love of God and the grace of God. It is not always easy to realize and embrace that the love and grace of God is for everyone. In fact, sometimes, it is easier to turn away and to choose a different path. Where else would we go? God is creating the ultimate "neighborhood" in those who follow Jesus. *As you think about your relationship with Christ, how do you make that real in your life? In what ways do your relationships at work, at home and in your neighborhood give witness to your faith in God?*

Thursday, August 30, 2018 Ephesians 3: 5-9

Paul writes that God's plan all along had been for people everywhere. The earliest followers of Jesus didn't know or perhaps understand that Christ's ministry was to expand God's grace to all the world. The outsiders/gentiles/nonbelievers were to be included in the reign of God. Paul, originally one of the insiders, became a servant of that good news. That happened by God's grace, not because of any goodness on Paul's part. In fact, Paul considered himself the least of all believers and apostles because of his persecution of the faith. By God's grace, Paul expanded the neighborhood, and opened it up to everyone. God is so good and so loving Paul does not want to hoard this goodness,, but shared it with everyone. *In terms of neighboring, how is goodness and love shared in your neighborhood? How does grace and love make a difference in you and through you?*

Friday, August 31, 2018 Ephesians 3: 10-12

In Christ we have confidence to approach God through faith. When we consider going away from Christ, it is our relationship with Christ that enables to keep fast to the promise of God's reign on earth. It is in our churches, our homes, our work places, our schools and our neighborhoods that we can experience the grace and love of God. As followers of Jesus, we are part of something bigger, something truer and deeper. In Christ are the words of life and hope, and a faith that strengthens everything we say and do. If we would go away, where would we go? Where else will we find life and love and grace? *Today, pray for yourself, your family, your friends, your co-workers and your neighborhood. Find one thing to do this long Labor Day weekend to be a good neighbor and a witness to God's love and grace in Christ Jesus.*