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We gather together in the presence of our Shepherd God, who calls us each by name, who restores our souls, who leads us in the way of righteousness and whose goodness and love never stop pursuing us. This is the God we have come to worship!

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out. A subjective person came along and said, "I feel for you down there." An objective person came along and said, "It's logical that someone would fall down there." A Pharisee said, "Only bad people fall into a pit." A mathematician calculated how he fell into the pit.

A news reporter wanted an exclusive story on his pit. A fundamentalist said, "You deserve your pit." An IRS man asked if he was paying taxes on the pit. A self-pitying person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen **my pit**." A charismatic said, "Just confess that you're not in a pit." An optimist said, "Things could be worse." A pessimist said, "Things will get worse."

Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit!

--David Gibbs, from a book by Barbara Johnson, in Ecunet .

No questions asked as to how the man ended up in the pit. No expectation of repayment. Lifting him out of the pit did not require Jesus to have prior physical exam to ensure he was healthy enough for heavy lifting. Just like the Samaritan in his parable, Jesus just did what needed to be done.

No matter how hard we try, it is just not easy for us to know who are neighbors are and then to reach out to them. The lawyer in our Gospel today knew very well about the commandments to love God with everything that he had and to then love his neighbors as himself.

But he demonstrates just how little he **really** knows when he asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor”?

Or maybe he was asking, ‘Who do I really need to love as much as I love myself? Who fits into my world view? Who is most deserving of my energy and my time?’

How often do we ask the same question? How often do we fail to see who our neighbors are?

I am following a blog written by a person whose name is Kaze Gadway. Kaze is a 78-Year-old Episcopal Lay minister who has spent years working with Native American Youth in Northern AZ. Her blogs about loving her neighbors are **especially** relevant. In her entry from July 2nd, she wrote:

(Names by Kaze Gadway)

“Hi W,” I call out to a friend on the street. His face lights up and we talk about the heat, the violence, the possibility of getting an apartment, safe places to sleep and where to line up for food. Those are the usual topics of conversations. Sometimes we talk about jobs. He shows me the necklace he has made.

“I found these pieces on the street and I have put them together. Maybe someone will buy it,” he says.

I praise his work and wonder where he found the turquoise and beads to make it. I don’t ask. He beams at my admiration for his creativity. He talks about how long he has been sober and how he is a better man for it.

In other words, a normal street conversation with people who just want to be a part of community, a settlement, a group; anything in which he or she can belong.

Every conversation starts with “My name is Kaze. What’s yours?” When I see the person again and can remember the name, then we are friends.

A name marks us as important and unique. Being called by name means you are noticed, no longer ignored as a “nothing.”

I don’t think there is anything more important to our calling as decent human beings than to notice and acknowledge another. When we call someone on the street by name, it denotes respect.

I love it when someone says “Oh, it’s you. Hi Kaze.” We all want to be acknowledged with respect.

Another entry, this month, is called ‘Can we Keep These? ‘

“As the teens at the El Paso refuge center accepted their backpacks, blankets. Spanish books and baseball caps, Rafael turns to me. “Are they going to take these away too?”

“No,” I say. You are going to stay with relatives in New York and they are yours to keep.”

Hector says, “Can we really keep these? I would rather give them up than be beaten for them again.”

I try to put authority in my voice. “You will be safe with your relatives. They will let you keep these things and you will get more.”

There is so much more I wanted to say but I know that they can still be deported for several years while their papers are being processed. I hope, by that time, that enough immigration lawyers will be able to make a dent in the mess we are in.

Meanwhile, I will continue to carry needed supplies to these refuge centers where they keep the asylum seekers for three days before they are transported to their sponsors.

I wish that we could deliver supplies to those children in containment camps where they are deprived of water, soap and adequate food. But they won't let us. So, we will do what we can. God have mercy".

Kaze is an amazing person. Paul opens his letter to the Colossians this morning with the following: "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace."

Much of the Gospel in the early church was spread via relationships. Without those intimate relationships, the Church may not have survived. Through their hope in the promised salvation and their faith in the Gospel message, the Colossians shared the love of Jesus with their neighbors. Like other early Church communities, it was **through** those relationships that Christianity grew. It simply is no different today.

These intimate communities, now, are few and far between. Many folks may know who their neighbors are on either side of them, at least by name or by sight. Go down three or 4 houses however, and most do not know anything about those neighbors. Many of us prefer that, and if we have an acre or two between us and our next-door neighbor, we are OK with that. In fairness, not all feel that way.

Mack McCarter, a pastor in West Texas, moved back home to Shreveport, LA in 1991. He became intrigued by the lack of close-knit communities especially in larger cities. In 1994, he started the Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal program. Shreveport and Bossier City are sister cities separated by the Red River in Louisiana's northwest corner. He started a Community Renewal Program with development of Friendship Houses in low-income, high crime neighborhoods. Every house was set up with a large community room where children could come after school, get help with their homework, or tutoring, and computer training. Part of the program was to train volunteers in each city block to be the leaders who could coordinate block parties, find the needs within that block, and get to know those who lived there. This program has been developing over the past 25 years, and not surprisingly, crime has dropped in those neighborhoods. McCarter says Community Renewal has trained 1,200 block leaders, and its goal is to reach 5,000 city blocks within the Shreveport-Bossier area. You can read more about this on their website. The program has since gone international and other cities in the US have started similar programs. It is not specifically religious in nature, but **it is** about knowing and caring about your neighbor.

Please know that when I mention programs such as the one started by Mack McCarter or the ongoing ministry of Kaze and her work with youth, the homeless, and refugees, I am not advocating **any** specific ministry or advising

anyone here to adopt a refugee family, to start a Friendship House in your neighborhood, to work at a shelter, or to serve food at a soup kitchen. These are all excellent, worthwhile ministries for sure. But just as Jesus is not asking us to walk the streets looking for someone who has been beaten and bleeding in the gutter, and to nurse them back to health; again, not a bad thing.

We **are** being asked to know and to love our neighbor wherever we find them and whatever their needs might be. This will almost certainly look different for each one of us as individuals, as a congregation, and as a community. For the past three days, I was helping out at the Big Provincial Gathering in Kalamazoo. This was an amazing event bringing over 330 Episcopalians, from Province 5, to learn ways of loving our neighbors and to share ideas with each other. Folks came from Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, and of course, Michigan. Episcopalians from other Provinces also came to see what we are doing. There will be more about this on their website soon. Just as Jesus tells the lawyer to 'Go and do likewise', **when we do that**, who knows where this will lead us, who we will have the opportunity to love, and what our world's will look like? Love truly does change lives. AMEN!