

Room for Your Neighbor

[SLIDE 1 — Room for Your Neighbor]



Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever sat down at a crowded table and heard someone say, “Scoot over a little. We need to make room for one more”? Maybe it was at Thanksgiving. Maybe it was a church dinner. Everybody was already settled. The plates were out, somebody had started passing the potatoes, and then another person arrived. Making room sounds easy until you’re the one who has to move. You’ve found a comfortable spot. You have enough space for your elbows. You can reach everything you need. Now somebody wants you to scoot over. You’re glad they came. You really are. But welcoming them means adjusting something about where you are sitting. There’s a little picture there of what it means to live together as God’s people. Our neighbor needs room, and sometimes making that room requires us to move. I know we’ve all experienced that right here at Trinity during the holidays when attendance swells and family and friends return to Church. That was my pew, but it’s good to have you here this week!

Room for Your Neighbor

Over the summer, we spent a couple of Sundays with the Ten Commandments. You might have heard today's reading and thought, "Pastor, didn't we just do this?" Yes, we did! So, this morning, let's pay particular attention to the people who have to live with us while we're trying to follow them. In Exodus 19, God calls Israel a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These people have just been rescued from slavery and barely cobbled together into a community. Now they have to learn how to share their freedom. That's not easy because my freedom affects your life. If I take whatever I want, somebody else loses something. If I say whatever comes into my head, somebody else may carry the hurt long after I have forgotten the conversation. If I insist everything happen on my schedule, somebody else may never get a chance to rest. We know that in our homes. We know it at work. And yes, we know it in church. We can all agree loving our neighbor is a good idea... in theory. The difficulty starts when my neighbor needs something that interferes with what I want. That's where these commandments meet us.

[SLIDE 2 — Making Room for Rest]



Listen to the commandment about the Sabbath. God names the people who are to rest: your children, your servants, and the stranger living in your community. Even the

Room for Your Neighbor

animals get a place in that commandment. It reaches beyond the person who gets to decide when the work stops. Someone with authority might say, “I’m taking the day off,” while you keep working.” God’s commandment makes that person look around and ask, “Who else needs rest?” Who depends on your permission to stop? Who is carrying a burden you have the power to lighten? People who had known life under Pharaoh were being taught to make room for rest in the lives of others.

That question still reaches us. Who gets to rest because of the way I live? Maybe someone in your family is always the one who notices what needs doing. They arrange the appointments, prepare the meals, and remember everything everybody else forgets. We might say, “You ought to take a break.” But have we picked up any of the work that would make a break possible? Sometimes loving our neighbor begins with doing the dishes.

[SLIDE 3 — Caring for a Good Name]



Then there is the commandment about bearing false witness. Most of us probably hear that and think, “Don’t lie.” But consider the neighbor whose name is the topic of many of our conversations. That person has a reputation. They have relationships and people who trust them. Our words can damage all of that. It doesn’t take a courtroom

Room for Your Neighbor

to bear false witness, it can happen over coffee, in a text message or when we pass along something we haven't checked out thoroughly because it sounds like something that person would do. "I'm only telling you what I heard." We can spread a story in a few seconds, but the person in that story may spend years trying to recover from it.

Making room for our neighbor means allowing room for an explanation. It means admitting we may not know the whole story. Sometimes it means saying, "I don't think we should pass that along." I know it can make a conversation awkward, but our neighbor's good name deserves our care, even when our neighbor isn't sitting at the table. That's especially hard for me. I love to hear all those juicy tidbits...

[SLIDE 4 — Sharing Our Neighbor's Joy]



And then we hear, "You shall not covet." That commandment can hit close to home because we can break it without moving a muscle. We see what someone else has, and suddenly the blessings in our own lives seem smaller. Their house. Their money. Their opportunities. Their family always looks so happy in their Facebook pictures. We may know very little about their life, but we know we want what we see. Eventually, it becomes difficult to rejoice with them. Their good news starts to feel like

Room for Your Neighbor

bad news for us. What a lonely way to live. It's been shown Facebook can cause or worsen depression, especially among younger users.

God calls us into a community where another person's joy can become something we share. There is room to be glad for them. There is room to give thanks for what we have received, too. Now, I could stop here and say, "So, let's all make more room for our neighbors this week." And that would sound like a reasonable sermon ending. But I know something about the person preaching this sermon. He doesn't always do it. I can become so occupied with my own concerns that I fail to notice what somebody else is carrying. I can speak before I have listened enough. I can recognize selfishness in someone else while finding a very good explanation for it in myself. Perhaps you know someone like that, too.

[SLIDE 5 — Forgiveness and New Life]



The commandments bring our neighbors into view. They also reveal how often we have pushed those neighbors aside. We need forgiveness. We need help that reaches deeper than another promise to try harder. That's where the Commandments turn us to Jesus Christ. Jesus can and did fulfill each and every jot and tittle of every Commandment. Not only that, Jesus sees the people others overlook. He listens to

Room for Your Neighbor

voices others try to silence and welcomes people whose reputations have caused everyone else to pull away. That includes each and every one of us.

At the cross, Jesus bears the sin that has broken our relationships with God and with one another. Our selfishness and careless words are among the things he carries. Through his death and resurrection, he gives us forgiveness and new life. This morning, our Thanksgiving for Baptism reminded us God claims us as daughters and sons and makes us servants of all. Those words belong together. As God's beloved children, we have somewhere to bring our failures. We can confess them without pretending. We can hear Christ's forgiveness and begin again, as servants of all.

[SLIDE 6 — Making Room This Week]



For us here at Trinity, that may mean noticing someone who needs a place to sit and someone to talk with. It may mean giving a tired person some practical help like some food or help with a rent payment. It may mean protecting someone's reputation when a conversation starts heading in the wrong direction. We don't have to wait for a grand opportunity. There will be somebody beside us today or this week whose needs we can notice, whose burden we can help carry. At a crowded table, the invitation is simple: "Scoot over. There's room for one more."

Room for Your Neighbor

May the Holy Spirit help us hear that invitation in our everyday lives. And when we discover how tightly we have held our own place, may Christ's forgiveness free us to Seek, Welcome, and serve all. Amen.