**Love One Another**

**First Presbyterian Church**

**Pittsford, NY 14534**

**September 3rd, 2017**

1. My mom moved my brother, sister and me to Delray Beach in South Florida in 1979.
	1. We quickly learned to pay attention to hurricane season which runs between June 1st and November 30th.
	2. Our first summer there, we prepared feverishly for Hurricane David.
		1. We couldn’t afford storm shutters so we used masking tape to create a lattice work protection on our windows.
		2. We removed anything from the outdoors that could become a projectile.
		3. We stockpiled food, water, sterno and lighting elements.
		4. When the Hurricane passed over us, we huddled together in the safest part of our home and prayed.
			1. The eeriest part was the calm during the eye of the storm.
			2. Remember, this was 1979.
			3. Internet was not common.
			4. Cell phones didn’t exist.
			5. Power had been out for hours and we had no other source of information.
			6. We had no way of knowing when we were in the eye or if the hurricane had moved off beyond us.
			7. We stayed huddled b/c none of us knew when the other side of the hurricane would hit.
				1. It was a terrifying time.
		5. Thankfully, we didn’t have any lasting damage from that first of many hurricanes, but many of our neighbors did.
			1. After the hurricane moved on, we were out helping our neighbors clean up, find pets, and generally restore order to our neighborhood.
	3. Every summer since then, my family and I have paid close attention to the weather.
		1. Residents of Houston, the Gulf Coast, Florida and the Caribbean pay close attention as well.
		2. Pastors in Houston last Sunday grappled with the perennial question of how can a loving God permit awful things to happen to good people.
			1. This classic dilemma even has its own esoteric theological term – theodicy.
			2. Here’s what one faith leader wrote to his community:

Houston was founded on the banks of Buffalo Bayou 181 years ago, on August 30, 1836, by two brothers, Augustus and John Allen. The birth waters of our city are now flooded with the debris of present-day citizens’ past lives. In 1832, Augustus left the comforts of a job as a bookkeeper for the H. and H. Canfield Company, New York, and set out with his brother for the land-rich promise of Texas. Four years later, they purchased some 6,000 acres along Buffalo Bayou for $5,000 to establish a new city.

Houston began with and belongs to a bunch of bold nomads from all over the world who dared to venture out of their indigenous communities in search of a better life. In what has become the most culturally diverse city in the nation, here millions of people, speaking a hundred languages, from hundreds of countries, have found a home.

When asked why Houstonians take risks to help others, Judy Nyquist, arts patron and Houston Arts Alliance board member, said, “We love one another. It is embedded in the culture. Generosity is innate, celebrated and expected. There are just as many private boats rescuing people in the city as there are Coast Guard vessels. We are welcoming our neighbors into our homes using Airbnb’s disaster response program that harvests a database of homeowners willing to host others for a period without payment. Houstonians provide hospitality. This explains why when Katrina hit in 2005, we had no problem hosting 200,000 evacuees. We don’t waste time whining “why me?” We ask, “What can I do for my neighbor?” Each one of us gives the gift we have to offer.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

1. What can I do for my neighbor?
	1. Bad things are going to happen.
	2. How we choose to respond says a lot about whose we are.
	3. Paul boldly proclaimed he was redeemed by God’s grace in Jesus.
		1. As Paul wrote to the Romans, he paints us a picture of the new persons we can become when we love our neighbors as we love ourselves.
		2. This phrase Paul uses is the second half of Christ’s Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-32) to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.
			1. Remember that the Great Commandment is a twofold commandment – not really one, but not really two separable commandments either.
		3. One could suggest that Romans 1-11 spells out the first part of the commandment: “How do we love God with all our heart, minds, soul and strength?”
			1. Here’s a clue: we are justified – that is, made right with God – by grace through faith in Jesus.
	4. Romans 12-14 shows the various ways in which we live out the second part: Love your neighbor as yourself.
		1. We can look to the list from last week’s reading about what genuine love is.
		2. Love is the essence of discipleship, the basis for transformative change.
		3. What the law cannot accomplish, love can.
		4. Love is a change or transformation of the heart – the core.
		5. When one is empowered to love God and neighbor, the spirit of the Great Commandment is filled.
			1. There is no need to keep monitoring or policing whether one is doing what the law requires, because the one who embodies love does no wrong to a neighbor (v.10)
			2. Love does what is good to a neighbor.
		6. When asked “who is my neighbor?” Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan whose stained-glass image we have before us each Sunday.
			1. A Jewish traveler is stripped of clothing, beaten, and left half dead alongside the road.
				1. First a [priest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kohen) and then a [Levite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levite) comes by, but both ignore the injured person.
				2. Finally, a [Samaritan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritan) happens upon the traveler.
				3. Remember, Samaritans and [Jews](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jews) generally despised each other, but the Samaritan compassionately helps the traveler.
			2. Pastor Bruce has reminded us for 16 years that these windows visually reinforce to us the importance of having compassion for our neighbors and being humble in our relationships.
	5. Another Presbyterian Pastor, Fred Rogers, taught several generations what it means to love your neighbor as yourself in Mr. Rogers neighborhood.
		1. With each episode, Mister Rogers invites “Won’t you be my neighbor?” – reminding us that in God’s eyes, we are all neighbors.
			1. When Daniel Tiger’s feelings are hurt, the king himself acknowledges the things that have gone wrong and helps Daniel cope with his feelings.
			2. Pastor Fred Rogers tackled the tough issue of theodicy – why do bad things happen to good people – with compassion and humility.
			3. He showed the residents of the neighborhood how dependent they are upon one another and upon God – in stormy situations or the flux of every day anticipated change.
	6. Paul offers a practical suggestion for coping with life changes big and small, anticipated or unexpected, positive or negative.
		1. Paul’s practical suggestion is a fashion tip to die for: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh.”
			1. By flesh you will remember that Paul does not mean simply the usual suspects: gluttony, drunkenness and selfish sexuality.
			2. This vice list is suggestive, not exhaustive.
				1. It resonates with our tendencies to binge drinking, binge eating or binge watching or binge anythinging.
			3. Do you remember the two dystopian novels Brave New World and 1984?
				1. George Orwell’s 1984 may be better known, but Aldous Huxley’s dystopian Brave New World seems to have projected the future into our present more accurately.
				2. Written in the shadow of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, 1984 shows a world ruled by an oligarchical dictatorship with perpetual war, pervasive government surveillance and incessant public mind control.
				3. Set in 2540 AD, Brave New World was published in 1932 and began as a parody of H. G. Wells' optimistic and utopian novel Men Like Gods.
				4. Neil Postman contrasted the two visions in the foreword to his 1985 classic Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business.
				5. "We were keeping our eye on 1984.
				6. When the year came and [Orwell's] prophecy didn't, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves.
				7. The roots of liberal democracy had held.
				8. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by Orwellian nightmares.
				9. But we had forgotten that alongside Orwell's dark vision, there was another -- slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: Aldous Huxley's Brave New World.
				10. "Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing.
				11. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression.
				12. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history.
				13. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.
				14. What Orwell feared were those who would ban books.
				15. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one.
				16. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information.
				17. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism.
				18. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us.
				19. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.
				20. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us.
				21. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.
				22. Huxley was referencing what Paul called flesh – for which we should make no provision.
			4. Flesh for Paul represents all the devices and desires by which we try to fortify ourselves – not with Jesus, but against God and against our neighbor.
		2. Make no provision for the flesh means “By God’s grace, turn from your self-absorption.”
			1. It means help those who could use a good Samaritan.
				1. Be it those recovering from Harvey, Irmageddon, or any other personal storm that knocks us literally or metaphorically off our feet.
			2. It means move on from whining why me.
			3. It means moving to loving one another today as we bid adieu to the Boaks and begin a new academic year as well as each day of our lives.
1. <https://www.faithandleadership.com/marlon-f-hall-houston-people-who-love-their-neighbors?utm_source=FL_newsletter&utm_medium=content&utm_campaign=FL_feature> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)