

“Time Bandits”

Luke 10:38-42

Series: The Art of Neighboring Week 2. The Barrier of Time

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

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He said, “My name is Warner – like Warner Brothers.” I didn’t know if that was his first name or his last. Turned out to be his first. It was the very day I moved in to 195 Rice Drive. Warner, who lives at 193, wasted no time coming over to meet and welcome the new neighbors. I can say without exaggeration that Warner and his wife Hilda are the very best neighbors in history. When it comes to the art of neighboring they are Michelangelos. Why do I say this? Well, remember the character Wilson from Tim Allen’s TV show *Home Improvement*? He’s based on Warner – except that I’ve seen the bottom half of his face and he doesn’t dispense all those strange mystical quotations. What he does do is help me with my home improvements – 26 years of home improvements. He knows how to do everything and he has the right tool for the task. Electrical problem? He prevents me from blowing my fuse. Plumbing issue? He keeps my head above water. Landscaping disaster? The grass really is greener on his side of the fence.

Yet the greatest gift Warner give is his time. He doesn’t just tell me how to do it and hand me the tool. When I ask him a question he often will drop what he is doing and come over to show me how it’s done. Warner has spent countless hours at my house helping me get through a tough and tricky problem. Quite often, when Hilda can’t find Warner, she knows where to look. Warner also keeps an eye on my house. One time, Lisa and I went away on vacation and left our car at the body shop for some repair work. When Warner saw the car missing from our driveway, he actually drove up to the church to see if it was parked here. He worried it was stolen. Like I said: he’s the greatest neighbor in history.

Time: it’s more precious than money. You can always make more money. You can’t get back lost time. This month we are in a series called *The Art of Neighboring* – learning how to fulfill the commandment to love our neighbors. Were you able learn the names of those who live around you on the block map we handed out last week? Well that takes time. And in this second week we examine the time it takes to love our neighbors as ourselves. Time is one of the greatest gifts we give those we love including our neighbors. Good relationships require an investment of time. Yet time is often the very barrier which blocks us from loving our neighbor. “Yes, I’d like to get to know and help my neighbors,” we think, “but I just don’t have the time.” Quite often, we don’t feel we have enough time for those who live in our house let alone in the eight houses around us. The truth is: we all have the same amount of time. Each day God gives each one of us the same 86,400 seconds. The real question is how do we spend them?

We actually have more time available to us than any previous generation in history thanks to progress and technology. We don’t need to grow our food, haul our water or generate our power. Tasks which used to take hours – cooking, cleaning, commuting, communicating – are much quicker. If you told me twenty-five years ago that I would be able to call people from my car, access all the world’s knowledge on my phone, send a message to everyone in the congregation with the push of a button, and lead a Bible study with someone in San Diego I would have said you were crazy. All these advances make it possible for us to be more effective and efficient.

Then something else radically affected our time. If 12 months ago you told me that schools, restaurants, and businesses would be closed, that major league sports would be curtailed and cancelled, that the political conventions would be held only online, that funerals, weddings and worship services would be limited to 25 people and that wearing masks would become the latest fashion statement, I would have said you were crazy. Not only do we have more time than any previous generation but nearly all that time is spent in our houses in our neighborhoods. I do not think this pandemic was sent by God. But maybe one way He hopes to use it is to give us more time to love and help our neighbors.

So with all this time on our hands at home, why don't we spend some of it on our neighbors? Well of course we need to be careful to socially distance and not spread the virus. Yet there are some forces which steal our time. I call them Time Bandits. Here are three.

The Myth of More. Many of us live with over stuffed schedules because we are trained and told that we need to do more: accomplish more, achieve more, acquire more. This myth tells us more is better so we invest our precious time in more. We work more hours so we can earn more money so we can buy more things so we will receive more love and affection. We tell our families, "I know I'm busy but someday things will settle down. Just let me get to next week, next month, next year. It will only be for a little more." Yet this is a myth. Someday never comes. We keep chasing more.

The Myth of Media. Technology gives us more time but it also gives us more ways to waste that time. A group of us fiftysomethings were reminiscing this week. When we were young there were three or four TV stations and Saturday morning cartoons only went to noon. Now there are thousands of TV stations, millions of streaming movies on demand and whole cartoon networks. Plus there are countless computer games and social media sites to soak up every second.

The Myth of Martyrdom. This is tricky because serving others sounds like a good investment of time. Yet we can do the right thing for the wrong reason. When we serve out of guilt (I owe this to you), obligation (I have to do this for you), or manipulation (I hope you appreciate all I do for you) it's service with strings attached. This doesn't build up relationships.

A perfect example is the story of Martha and Mary. This comes right after Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors and Martha intends to do just that by hosting Jesus and his disciples.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" Luke 10:38-40

I want to defend Martha for a minute. She's been misunderstood. Martha opens her home to Jesus and his entire entourage which is probably a lot more than thirteen people. Meals are a big deal in the Middle East and hospitality is legendary. The task is so great Luke says she is "distracted." The Greek word means she is stressed, obsessed, distressed with all the preparations. What's more, the word "preparations" and "work" are the same word: diakonia from which we get our word

“deacon.” It means “service” as in serving a meal and it also means “ministry.” Martha is going crazy serving and ministering to Jesus while her lazy sister Mary sits on the floor and soaks up Jesus’ teaching. I bet Martha would love to do that but there’s work to be done!

Or would she? I guess I want to defend Martha because I identify with Martha. It’s hard for me to sit and soak like Mary. I feel much more comfortable ministering to Jesus than ministering like Jesus or with Jesus. And here’s the irony: I can invest so much time doing the ministry that I have little time left for people. For Jesus people are the ministry. If anything distracts you from people it’s not ministry. Jesus always has time for people. In the Gospels Jesus is interrupted all the time. He is often interrupted by someone on the way to do something else. I can get irritated sometimes when I get interrupted from doing my ministry. For Jesus the interruptions are the ministry.

It’s easy to miss a very awkward moment in this story. In English it says, Martha “came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” In Greek it says: Martha came and stood over Jesus. See the picture? Martha stands over Jesus, asks the Lord if He cares and then dictates to Him what He should tell Mary while Mary sits quietly at the Lord’s feet and learns from Him. Jesus gently replies,

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:41-42

When God says your name twice, He wants to get your attention. Jesus says Martha is anxious and stirred up about many things. The word stirred up comes from Turbo. Remember how we had turbidity in our water when it was all stirred up last year. It’s the same word. Martha is agitated about a lot of things. Mary focuses on one thing: listening to Jesus.

Don’t minister to Jesus. Minister with Jesus. This week, make a decision to invest part of your time in getting to know your neighbors, listening to your neighbors, sitting socially distanced with your neighbors, helping your neighbors. Commit to spending one hour this week in your front yard. Sit out in the morning or the evening. Say hello to those who walk by. Because of this sermon series Lisa and I spent some extra time with one of our neighbors. He’s lived in the same house for 50 years. Half of that time we’ve lived across the street from him. Several years ago his wife passed away but he stayed there. Now he is planning to move to live with his daughter. He’s a quiet man so we’ve not had much interaction with him but I think a large reason for that is we’ve not invested the time to get to know him. Once we asked him about his plans he opened up and shared a great deal about his new home, his family, his years living on our street and how he often misses his wife. I am sorry to say we spoke more to him in that one conversation than we have in all the previous 26 years combined.

Let’s be like Jesus. Let’s be like Warner. As I said before, Warner is always keeping an eye on our house. Years ago, when my children reached the age when we thought it might be okay for them to be home alone in the house, we decided to do a little test run. It was daylight. The kids came home from school and I would arrive 30 minutes later. So we gave them a key, told them to let themselves in and lock the door. I would be there in half an hour. It should be fine. What can go wrong in half an hour? During those exact 30 minutes my kids were in the house playing on

the computer, a woman opened the chain link gate, entered my backyard and stared in the windows. My children had no idea this was happening. How do I know all this? Warner saw her. Sensing this was suspicious, he walked into the backyard and asked, "What are you doing?" The woman replied, "I'm giving them an estimate on their landscaping." Warner knows that I am so cheap I do all my own landscaping. He went around to the front and rang the doorbell. The kids didn't hear it and didn't answer. So Warner went back to talk the woman only to see her run away out of our backyard and down the street. She must have be part of the ring that was breaking into homes all over our neighborhood.

Warner protected my family ... just in time.

That's the way to love your neighbors.