

**These Windows Can Speak**  
**Part 2: Fruitful Neighbours**  
**In Honour of Muriel and Donald Pearson**  
**Text: Luke 10:29**  
**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**  
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A friend of mine was riding in a car recently with three young people in the backseat. They were on their way home from a rugby game in which the three teenage boys had played. Thinking they were just exhausted from the game, it didn't surprise her that the car was so quiet. Until she turned around and saw that all three were busy on their cell phones! 5 people in a car for 90 minutes. They could've talked about the rugby game, or other sports, or world issues, or even the weather! But hardly a word from anyone because each of these guys was doing his own thing on his phone.

I fear that we are becoming a nation of individuals; caught-up in ourselves and almost oblivious to what's happening around us. Of course, texting and twitter and Facebook and other things that folks might do on their cell phones are arguably forms of communication, but a limited form at best. When you can't see the face of the other person, or notice his body language, or even hear her voice, much of the communication is happening in your own head.

It's all about me! To heck with the person next to me, let alone the health of the environment or the needs of the homeless. It's all about me. That, I fear, is the kind of society which we're becoming.

It wasn't always this way. For generations, Canada was a place where neighbour helped neighbour. This was especially true in the rural communities of this nation. Farm families helped each other out. Families like the Pearsons. For generations they farmed the land in the vicinity of what's now Finch Ave. and Markham Rd. Indeed, there was a time when almost all of the families of this congregation were farmers. So it's fitting that one of our windows of faith depicts a farm scene. And if you could see the window, you'd see that it prominently displays a sheaf of wheat: that is to say, wheat which has just been harvested from the field; gathered together in a bundle. Do you know how that wheat was harvested? Folks from the neighbouring farms got together one day and helped the Pearsons take that wheat off their field. And the next day, Pearsons joined those same neighbours and helped another farmer harvest his grain.

It was about neighbour helping neighbour. That's how Canada prospered.

Jesus had something to say about neighbours. One day a lawyer asked him what one must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus characteristically turned the question back on the questioner. He said, "You tell me. You're a lawyer; what does the law say?"

And the man said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your *neighbour* as yourself."

Jesus said, "You're right! Do this, and you shall live."

But then the lawyer asked a very good question. He said, "Ah, but Jesus; who *is* my neighbour?"

Jesus responded by telling the story of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:25-37). And in that story, Jesus is telling us at least three things:

Your neighbour is someone who is in need.

Your neighbour is someone whom you may not like.

Your neighbour is someone who helps you to bear fruit.

Your neighbour is someone in need. To us, this is the most obvious lesson in the story of the Good Samaritan. That man who was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho got beat up pretty badly by those robbers. Lying there half dead at the side of the road, he was certainly in need. And the Samaritan, travelling up the same road, helped him.

Your neighbour is someone in need. And those first families who came to Agincourt in the 1840's were in need. They'd left almost everything behind in Scotland. No land, no money, just the clothes on their backs: they were in need. So the government helped them out. The government gave them land which they could farm. As long as they worked the land for a number of years and improved the road which ran past their farm, the land was theirs to keep. The government recognized those Scottish immigrants as neighbours.

Your neighbour is someone in need. I'll bet that the house and barn depicted in the Pearson window were built with the help of neighbours. A barn raising was a great community event. The families would gather from the neighbouring farms: the men to put up the barn, the women to cook the food and the children to run around, creating their own games. At noon the work stopped and everyone sat down to a great feast: bread made from the wheat of the field; meat from last year's prized bull; cold, rich milk from Jersey cows; eggs from the chickens, fruit pies from the farmers' orchards; and the table adorned with flowers from the garden. All the farm families pitching in: from each according to her abundance to each according to his need. I know that sounds like Karl Marx, but he got it from the Bible; check out Acts 2:43-45. Then back to work in the afternoon, and by the end of the day the newest immigrant had a house or a barn or whatever the building project of that day had been.

Your neighbour is someone in need. That's what those Presbyterian farmers had learned from their Bibles. They'd read in the book of Isaiah: "Is this not the fast that I choose...to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house...?" (see Isaiah 58:6-7). Or again, in this morning's psalm: "Give justice to the weak and the orphan, maintain the right of the lowly and destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy, save them from the hands of the wicked" (Psalm 82:3-4). For generations this has been the practice of farm families. For more than 160 years this has been the practice of this congregation. For nearly 2,000 years this has been the practice of the Church. We love our neighbours, *as Jesus commanded us to do so*. Whether the neighbour is an immigrant from Scotland in 1848, or a hungry family in the 1970's (when the Rev. Bruce Scott, a minister of this congregation, was devoting nearly 50% of his time to starting ACSA), or a homeless person today, Jesus commands us to love our neighbours by taking care of their needs.

Your neighbour is someone who is in need, and your neighbour is someone whom you may not like. That fellow going down from Jerusalem to Jericho was probably a Jew, and the man who helped him was a Samaritan, and Jews hated Samaritans. Yet here's Jesus telling a Jewish audience that the neighbour to that half-dead Jew was: a *Samaritan*; a *hated* Samaritan!

Your neighbour is someone whom you may not like. Indeed, your neighbour may be someone whom you despise.

The movie *Gandhi* depicts the violence between Hindus and Muslims in the wake of the British partition of India in 1947. In a fit of rage a Hindu has murdered a Muslim. Filled with remorse, the murderer comes to Gandhi and asks what he must do to make things right. Gandhi tells this guilt-ridden Hindu that he must go into the streets, and find an orphaned Muslim child, and raise the child *as a Muslim*.

Your neighbour is someone who is in need. Your neighbour is someone whom you may not like. And, your neighbour is someone who helps you to bear fruit. The farmer coaxes the fruit of the earth from the fertile soil: corn and wheat, beans and peas, apples and peaches, and prize-winning flowers from the garden. Farming is about helping the soil bear fruit, and Christian community is about helping each other bear fruit. The author of the Letter to the Colossians bids the members of that early Christian community to “lead lives worthy of the Lord...as you bear fruit in every good work” (Colossians 1:10).

And what is the fruit that the Church is called to bear? In Galatians, a letter that is indisputably written by Paul, we are told that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22). We are neighbours to each other when we encourage each other to live lives which bear such fruit. We are neighbours to each other when we practice these spiritual virtues ourselves, thus modelling Christian behaviour for the world.

You see, the Word of God is like a seed which is planted in the soil of humanity. When we read the Bible, when we hear a sermon, when we read a wise book or hear a profound lecture, we are like the soil into which a farmer plants a seed. The seed actually dies; it splits apart and is absorbed into the ground. But from that seed comes the wheat or the corn; from that seed comes the fruit by which we are fed. Likewise we may remember little of the specific content of a sermon or a book or a lecture or even of the Bible. But if we practice the discipline of reading and listening, we receive that Word into the rich soil of our hearts. And then, as we live out our lives with each other here at Knox and in this community of Agincourt and Scarborough and Toronto and indeed the community of the whole world; as we live out our lives here with our neighbours, that seed which seems to have died is in fact growing within us, and within our community, and in God’s good time it will bear the fruit of love and joy, patience and kindness, generosity and gentleness.

The Pearsons’ farm was called Limestone Farm because there was a huge limestone outcrop in the front yard. That too is depicted in the Pearson window. Limestone is the bedrock of southern Ontario; the firm foundation beneath the rich soil which bears such abundant fruit. Likewise Jesus Christ is the bedrock of the Church. He is the firm foundation of our lives; the One without whom we could do nothing. Our lives bear fruit – our lives are an outpouring of love of neighbour – to the extent that we trust him to uphold us, to empower us, to carry us through difficult times. “Who is my neighbour?”, the lawyer said. Your neighbour is the needy homeless person for whom we are seeking to provide affordable, supportive housing. Your neighbour is the newcomer to this community, who may be of a race and from a culture which is different from your own. Your neighbour is the person sitting next to you. As you care for him, and she cares for you, and we all work together in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will bear the fruit of God’s Kingdom. Amen.