

Sermon Series: Who Is My Neighbor?
Sermon Title: "Neighbors Are Out of This World"
Psalm 34:1-10; Matthew 5:1-12; Revelation 7:9-17
Salem United Methodist Church November 6, 2016
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This sermon is the second one in a series called, "Who Is My Neighbor?" We can define neighbor as the person who lives next door and/or persons who live halfway around the world, but did you ever think that our neighbors can exist outside of this world? As we remember all those who are receiving eternal life with God today, could they be our neighbor, too?

If you are a baseball fan, then you know this past week was a historical one. The Chicago Cubs won the World Series for the first time in 108 years. Yes, the last time the Cubs won the World Series was in 1908. However, the Chicago Cubs defeated the Detroit Tigers in the fifth game of the World Series, not the seventh one. In 1908 Theodore Roosevelt was president. The first New Year's Eve ball fell in New York City that year. Henry Ford invented the first Model-T car. The upright vacuum cleaner was invented. And there was a presidential election in November. Republican William Howard Taft defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan. But the Republican President Taft succeeded the Republican President Roosevelt.

Back to the Cubs...The Onion, an online satirical news organization based in Chicago, published an article called, "Millions Of Drunk Cubs Fans Rioting In Heaven Following World Series Win" in its sports section. The article stated, "Moments after watching the game's final out from above Earth, massive throngs of intoxicated Cubs fans—most of whom went their entire lives without ever seeing the team win a World Series—poured out all over the eternal city, where they reportedly continued drinking heavily as they cheered, hugged strangers, and loudly played golden harps in celebration of their long-awaited championship." The article continues, "'We did it!' shouted former Chicago resident Arnold Mathis, a victim of the 1918 flu pandemic, after climbing up the Tree of Life and bouncing on one of its branches. 'I can't believe we actually did it!'" The article continues to report that heavenly Cub fans behaved in some non-heavenly ways such as littering the streets of gold and toppling God's heavenly throne. The article concludes with this, "At press time, sources within Heaven confirmed that hundreds of disorderly Cubs fans had been apprehended and sent to Hell."

As I read this article, besides laughing at the satire, I realized that the writer is honing in on something Christians recognize- that there is an intersection of our time and eternity. Human time is chronological time. We recognize a past, the present, and the future whatever that may look like. We remember our past through the retelling of family stories and through recorded history. We learn much about who we are today through studying history. Remembering our past is important because it influences the present. For instance, remembering the acts of God in the lives of people in the Bible can teach us that God is present in our lives now. When we remember how God transformed Moses from a murderer into a deliverer, and we find hope that God can transform us. When we remember how God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and we are assured that God keeps promises. When we remember God's faithfulness to the Israelites when they turned their back on God and later returned to God. They were forgiven and God gave them a new life. Because of God's faithfulness to the Israelites, we can trust that if or when we abandon God, God won't abandon us, but will patiently wait for us to return to God. The stories of the past help us understand who we are in the present. We can read about Jesus who as God humbled himself to become human, who demonstrated God's unconditional love, who taught about and showed us

God's love and forgiveness with his death on the cross, and whose Resurrection demonstrates that intersection of our time and eternity. The Resurrection happened in our past 2000 years ago, but in that moment eternity reached into our present time to give us new life now. In the Resurrection, God reaches from eternity into our human present time to show us the way to our future and to eternity. The past, present, future, and eternity are all wrapped together in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. God resides eternally in human past, present, and future. We reside only in the present. The Resurrection of Jesus is God's eternity crossing the path of human time in the present.

We celebrate this intersection of time in the liturgy of the Great Thanksgiving Prayer. This prayer brings together or unites the past, the present, and the future. We begin this prayer by remembering what God has done by naming specific acts of God and give thanks for them. Next in the prayer, we acknowledge how God's eternity intersects with the present as together, we with all the company of heaven offer praise to God. Then united with our heavenly neighbors we acknowledge that God is holy, powerful and mighty, and recognizing that the glory of God is resides both in heaven and on earth.

The next part of the liturgy of the Great Thanksgiving slips back into the past remembering what Jesus did on the night before he faced the great humiliation, his death on a cross. Jesus created a new covenant for us. His part of the covenant is to demonstrate God's forgiving love by actually dying for us. Our part of the covenant is to offer our very lives to Christ. What has happened in the past in Christ's death and resurrection, now reaches into the present in our lives today. Jesus reaches from eternity into our present to make this covenant again with us. All this is a mystery. Science cannot explain it. It is not time travel. God's time is not our time. The past, present, and future intersect again when we say: Christ has died (past tense). Christ is risen (present tense). And Christ will come again (future tense). In this phrase we are declaring that eternity intersects all human time: past, present, and future.

Today we will pray for communion with all the saints we name. We will name those persons who have died this past year. Each name that is read is a family member, a friend, a co-worker, or a neighbor of someone in this congregation. The word, communion, shares the same root as the word, community, and that is *communio* which means coming together or a mutual sharing. We often call The Lord's Supper, Communion, because it is a coming together, God with us, and us with God. Communion is an intersection of our present time and eternity. This is why we offer up the names of those who died right smack in the middle of the Great Thanksgiving prayer. We pray for the intersection of eternity with our present. We pray for this communion, this coming together of us with all the saints, our neighbors who are out of this world!

Their suffering is over. Every tear is wiped away. They stand with others from around the world, from other nations and cultures, celebrating the victory, not the Cubs victory, but the victory they have in God through Jesus. They are shouting, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and always. Amen." When we pray for the communion with all the saints we are praying to join them in this praise to our God.

Praising God when a loved one dies is very difficult. We hurt. We grieve. We miss them terribly. However, as Christians we have this hope of communion, this hope that the future can reach back into the present, this hope that eternity intersects with the present. Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." Jesus is in our past. Jesus is in our present. Jesus is in our future. And Jesus lives in all eternity intersecting our human time, communing with us where we have been, where we are, and where we will be. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Resources: *Calendar: God's Time for the Church* by Larry Stookey; *United Methodist Hymnal*

