

# On Being the Neighbor:

How John Wesley's Reading of the Parable of the Good Samaritan  
May Cultivate Loving People

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*And who is my neighbor?*

*Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor  
to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?*

*Go and do likewise.*

*Let us go and do likewise, regarding every one as our neighbor who needs our assistance.*

*Let us renounce that bigotry and party-zeal which would contract our hearts  
into an insensibility for all the human race, but a small number whose sentiments  
and practices are so much our own, that our love to them is but self-love reflected.*

*With an honest openness of mind, let us always remember the kindred  
between man and man; and cultivate that happy instinct whereby,  
in the original constitution of our nature, God has strongly bound us to each other.*

I'd like to talk to you about Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. I fear this is a little like learning about a butterfly by dissecting its wings; I'm painfully aware of this possibility, and am unsure whether bringing John Wesley into the conversation will save the butterfly or not. I suppose we'll see soon enough. In any case, this evening I have a job to do and so do you. Mine is to talk with you about matters of great importance; yours is to listen and consider these things. I can only hope that you won't finish your job before I finish mine! (You may have some hopes of your own in that regard.)

The parable of the Good Samaritan has become nearly a cliché; even Jesus' conclusion to the conversation that inspired the parable, his instruction to "Go and do likewise," is widely known – if rarely practiced. But John Wesley's comments on this amazing parable – and particularly on Jesus' final words to the Torah expert with whom he was conversing – are, I venture to guess, far more strange to our ears and likely to hold considerable surprise.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the parable has been read and heard by us all, perhaps many times, there are critical observations that will help to set the stage for Wesley's brief commentary on it in his *New Testament Notes*. Permit me to mention the aspects of the parable that have intrigued me, now, for many years:

1. The larger conversation in which the parable is situated begins with the question of a "lawyer," or expert in Jewish law (today perhaps we'd say "biblical scholar" or, more frighteningly, "theologian") who addressed Jesus with a "test" question: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
2. As is characteristic of Jewish teaching style, Jesus answers that question with two of his own: "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" Interesting pair of questions! The first implies a meaning inherent in the Torah, conveyed in writing; the second implies the importance of what has come to be known as reader response. That second question, "What do you read there?" places a critical element of responsibility, we might even call it moral responsibility, upon the reader of the text.

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley's commentary, from his *New Testament Notes*, is admittedly almost a verbatim citation from Philip Doddridge's *The Family Expositor; or, a Paraphrase and Version of the New Testament, with critical notes, and a practical improvement of each section*, 3 vols. (London: J. Wilson, 1739-1748). Arguably the most important change Wesley makes in Doddridge's text is to replace the word "man" with "one": "Let us go and do likewise, regarding every one as our neighbor . . ."

3. The Torah expert replies with the dual command of love for God and neighbor, the same pair of commands that in Matthew are identified by Jesus as the two greatest, the two upon which “hang all the law and the prophets” (22:40). Let us note, too, that John Wesley often appealed to the same two commandments as both prescriptive, and descriptive, of the life of Christian perfection.
4. Jesus’ response to the Torah scholar deserves our careful attention. “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” I encourage us to hear this for the deeply Jewish conversation that it is. The gospel of Luke is granting us access to a discussion between two Jews about the nature of the Torah and the life of the world to come. The Torah is the path of life, given to the people of Israel, Jesus’ own people, as a way in which to walk faithfully and to live truly. The conversation between Jesus and the Torah expert, even if launched under the impulse of “testing” Jesus, breathes the atmosphere of Deuteronomy, where we read: “Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. . . . No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. . . . Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him . . . “ (30:11, 14-15, 19-20). Similarly, Jesus says, “Do this – love God with all of your being and love your neighbor as though he or she is yourself – and you will live.”
5. “Wanting to justify himself,” the text informs us without further explanation, the scholar then asked one of the great questions of human history: “And who is my neighbor?”
6. As theoretical as that question might sound, and likely deserving of the sort of philosophical analysis as it might receive from the likes of G.E. Moore or our own Edwin Crawford, Jesus simply tells a story. A great story.
7. It is of course no insignificant, throwaway detail that the first two figures to pass by the poor victim of robbers on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem were a priest and a Levite. Both had Temple responsibilities; this means that both had obligations to maintain a high standard of ritual holiness. Touching, or even coming near, a corpse would have rendered them ritually unclean, and therefore unfit for Temple service. The point then would not be necessarily that these are cold and unfeeling men; it is not about their capacity for mercy or empathy or any such thing, but about a religious system – any religious system – that actually undercuts the possibility of exercising compassion. Given that it is in this same gospel that Jesus instructs his followers to “be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate” (6:36), there is no small irony in a situation in which religious service in the Temple would actually weaken our ability to feel empathy for someone left “half dead.” From the far side of the road, “half dead” is undoubtedly difficult to distinguish from “completely dead” – and the priest and the Levite had too much at stake, religiously speaking, to take that chance.
8. Jesus’ listeners, presumably all Jews, would have been set up by the story thus far to expect a Jewish layperson to be the hero, the one to “act justly and show mercy.” Then the parable could have functioned as a sharp criticism against the ritual holiness system of the Temple (and thus also of the Pharisees) – who held to a doctrine of holiness-as-separation from that which is unclean – and instead champion the everyday compassion of the ordinary Jew.

9. So when Jesus said, “But a *Samaritan* while traveling came near him,” he blew his listeners’ minds. The minds blown most completely would have been those of his disciples. We should appreciate that this marvelous parable is found only in Luke’s gospel; so also is the story of Jesus and his disciples being refused hospitality in a Samaritan village. In fact, that story is in Luke 9, almost immediately preceding this parable of the Samaritan who showed compassion. You might recall that the disciples, in the face of Samaritan hatred for Jews – and especially for Jews like they were, Jews on their way to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple – asked Jesus after they were kicked out of town, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven to destroy them?” I think Jesus generally liked questions, but he didn’t like this one at all – and in the very next chapter of Luke’s gospel, here’s Jesus spinning this story about a Samaritan who displays great compassion toward a Jew. No one in his audience would have been feeling edified or entertained by Jesus’ story. People can get into a lot of trouble for a lot less than this.
10. And finally, number 10, we come to the most fascinating, and likely the most important, part of this conversation: Jesus, upon finishing his parable, asks yet another question. It is a different question from the theologian’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” – even if it sounds something like it. Jesus asks instead: “Which of these three, do you think, *was a neighbor* to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The scholar had asked, “Who is my neighbor? I know I’m commanded to love my neighbor, but perhaps you could help me to know where to draw the line.” Who is inside the “neighbor circle” – and thus, by implication, who is outside? Who is my neighbor – and who isn’t? *Jesus took that question and did far more than simply turn it on its head; he turned it inside-out! Who was a neighbor to the man in the ditch?*

The first time I ever read Wesley’s commentary on this conversation in Luke, I was delighted by it – but I also believe that he missed the fine point of Jesus’ question. Wesley wrote, “Let us go and do likewise, regarding every one as our neighbor who needs our assistance.” That is a wonderful piece of advice, no doubt; but it seems to me to veer wide of the point. Again, while the theologian asked “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus’ counter-question was “Who proved to *be* a neighbor?” Who actually performed the deeds of neighbor-hood? It’s the difference between trying to *find* a neighbor and trying to *be* the neighbor yourself. The word “neighbor” comes from the old English word “nigh,” meaning near – and so to *be* the neighbor means to take the initiative, to “draw near,” to get close. If I become the neighbor, then everyone is my neighbor and there is no one who is not. Who proved to *be the neighbor* takes the question “Who is my neighbor?” and turns it inside-out.

Wesley, like most other commentators on Luke, missed the significance of Jesus' counter-question. Again, this does not mean that there is anything wrong with "regarding every one as our neighbor who needs our assistance" – and I am in no position, really, to criticize Wesley who lived all of this far more radically, more faithfully, more completely than I likely ever will. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing that Jesus does not rest content with us asking about who our neighbors are; he challenges us to take the initiative, to draw near, to become the neighbor – which can only mean to become the neighbor to *all people*.

I remember a conversation that occurred over 20 years ago, in our first year in Atlanta, during my PhD work. I was at a men's prayer breakfast at the local Church of the Nazarene where Janice and I had become members. It was great Southern cooking that morning! I sat next to a man I had not gotten to know much at all, so I engaged him in conversation, asking, among other things, if he had grown up in a Nazarene home. "No," he told me, "I was actually raised Quaker." One of my fellow doctoral students at Emory was a Quaker, so I mentioned that and added, "The Quakers have a lot of good folks." "Yeah, well, I left the Quaker Church during the war in Viet Nam," he answered. "Oh really? Why is that?" I asked, already suspecting how his answer might develop. "Well, you know, they set up medical units during the war that helped the North Vietnamese." Probably this would have been a pretty good spot for me to just get back to my biscuits and gravy. But I was young and more adventurous, so I probed a little more. "Well, Jesus did tell us to love our enemies, didn't he?" I will never forget his immediate response: "That's where I draw the line."

And therein lies the logic of the question "Who is my neighbor?" If I know who my neighbor is, then I know where I can conveniently draw the line. It plagues me, and I hope you, that this gentleman found it much easier to draw the line as a Nazarene than he had as a Quaker. He had to leave the Quakers in order to draw the line. And if I understand Jesus rightly, he would ask us all, "Who proved to be the neighbor to those in need?" With this question, "Who proved to be the neighbor?" you and I are called upon to take the initiative, to draw near, to become the

neighbor to the person or people that we would likely least expect. This does not allow us the convenience of drawing any lines.

As I have mentioned, Wesley seems to have missed this more radical note in Jesus' question, content simply to repeat what we have all heard and said, that the neighbor is anyone who is in need. Now, despite this mild criticism, I should add that Wesley did offer us an improvement over what appears to have been the most dominant interpretation of this parable through much of Christian history. The leading tendency has been to interpret the parable as an allegory, such that the poor roadside victim represents all of us fallen human beings, beaten and robbed of our dignity and goodness by Satan. Jesus then becomes the Good Samaritan, who tends to our wounds and takes us to the innkeeper, whose inn symbolizes the church. And so on. I found it in my research on early church leaders' interpretation of this parable, and found it repeatedly. Theologians try very hard to be faithful to church tradition, try to learn, to be schooled by the great thinkers and pastors and preachers and leaders who have lived faithfully before us. I believe we should all try to do this, that it is part of what it means to be members of the body of Christ that spans history and geography. Our belief in the church, in the communion of saints, should imply that those who have gone before us still have a voice. But here I have to draw a line myself, a different sort of line. For to turn this parable into an allegory about God's saving grace in Jesus Christ, delivering us and healing us from the roadside ditch of sin's destructive power – true as all of that is – courts the danger of draining the parable of its real power. There is, after all, a pair of challenges at the end of the parable: first is that question, Who proved to be the neighbor? And second, Jesus' parting words to this teacher: Go and do likewise. These challenges confront us with the divine calling to be the neighbor, to become the neighbor, to draw nigh especially to the marginalized, the rejected, the feared, the ones tossed off to the side of the road. To read it as an allegory begins, I fear, to let us off the hook. If Jesus is the Good Samaritan, then you and I may not feel the need so much to be one ourselves.

Happily, Wesley does not do this. We're still on the hook, so to speak. So let us examine Wesley's commentary on Jesus' words, "Go and do likewise."

*Let us renounce that bigotry and party-zeal which would contract our hearts into an insensibility for all the human race, but a small number whose sentiments and practices are so much our own, that our love to them is but self-love reflected.*

Jesus' parable, of course, played heavily upon the elements of "bigotry and party-zeal" that exercised considerable influence in the social world of which he was a part. There was no love lost between Jews and Samaritans, and while Luke's gospel has a unique interest in Samaritans and their inclusion in the renewed people of God through Jesus Christ, it is clear that this parable's power depends on the situation of mutual distrust and even violence that poisoned Jew-Samaritan relations during the time. For both Luke's purposes and ours, it is significant that Jews and Samaritans viewed each other as religiously suspect, if not downright heretical. We can illustrate this with the words attributed to Jesus in John's story of the woman at the well: "You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know; we [Jews] worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (Jn 4:22). All the more remarkable, then, that Jesus' hero of the story – the good guy, the one whose actions display what it is to truly *live* – is a Samaritan. Jesus' choice of material for his parable is in itself is a compelling example of loving one's enemy.

We should note that Wesley, in his commentary, identified a danger that our "bigotry and party-zeal . . . would contract our hearts into an insensibility for all the human race" except for those "whose sentiments and practices are so much our own, that our love to them is but self-love reflected." But this is, so often, the way we roll. We may even wonder whether it is possible for our love for others to be anything more, or higher, than "self-love reflected." Our social and individual identities are typically formed by defining ourselves "as opposed to" others, to those people over there beyond the line we have drawn, those who are not like us (and whom we therefore do not like). National identities, ethnic identities, sports team identities, denominational identities, political party identities – the list of potential elements in the social

construction of selfhood or identity is long indeed. Can this really be challenged – let alone undone? Are we even interested in seeing it happen? Given our deeply rooted tendencies to love those who are “near” to us (whether they are near physically, genetically, religiously, geographically, politically or in other ways), is it really even possible for human beings to respond to this parable’s world-shattering invitation to *become a neighbor to all people – and to do so by becoming a neighbor to one person at a time?* And, while of course the Samaritan in question is but a fictional character in a story Jesus weaved, we might still ask the question: How did the Samaritan do it? And why?

*With an honest openness of mind, let us always remember the kindred between man and man; and cultivate that happy instinct whereby, in the original constitution of our nature, God has strongly bound us to each other.*

It is fascinating that Wesley encourages us to adopt “an honest openness of mind,” as though to imply that this will be necessary if we are even going to be willing to “remember the kindred” binding human beings to one another. Would it not be a shame if we believed that our Christian faith would shape us toward any other sort of mind than an honestly open one? I fear that in many instances this is not what we have come to expect of our religious convictions. I remind you that the priest and the Levite in Jesus’ parable are not presented as having “an honest openness of mind” – precisely because of the nature of their Temple holiness faith and life. It was precisely their religious commitments that kept their minds, and hearts, closed off. Concern for maintaining ritual holiness apparently overrode any potential or possible feeling for “the kindred among [human beings].” But of course the priest and the Levite are not the good guys in the story.

We might notice, too, that as Jesus weaves his parable, his depiction of the Samaritan is not overtly religious. Granted, it’s just a story and the Samaritan functions as symbol for the outcast, the enemy, the non-neighbor within the world of Jesus’ listeners – but it is nonetheless fascinating that as Jesus describes this figure, there is no mention of his conscious awareness of, or obedience to, the laws of Moses (which, in fact, the Samaritans did acknowledge and obey);

no Samaritan prayer; no hint that the Samaritan was consciously doing something “religious” *per se*. As Jesus tells the story, according to Luke, the important point is that this Samaritan “came near [the brutalized man in the ditch]; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion.” The Samaritan, we might say, remembered in his belly and his bones “the kindred between man and man” – but he remembered it because he got close enough to see himself in that man in the ditch, close enough to *feel* the deep kindred sense.

This phrase, “the kindred between man and man,” comes from the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel.... Some of you will recall that this same phrase, “Between man and man,” was the title chosen by the great 20<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish philosopher Martin Buber for a collection of his essays first published in English in 1947. I mention this because it was exactly 30 years later, during Edwin Crawford’s first year as philosophy professor here at Northwest Nazarene, that I, then a senior philosophy major, read *Between Man and Man* under Ed’s tutelage. Wesley encourages us to “remember the kindred between man and man,” an idea with which Buber was deeply familiar, and equally enthusiastic. Here’s the very copy I read for the first time, now 32 years ago:

Only when I have to do with another essentially, that is, in such a way that he is no longer a phenomenon of my *I*, but instead is my *Thou*, do I experience the reality of speech with another – in the . . . genuineness of mutuality. . . . [When Jesus spoke of love for God and neighbor, it is clear:] Both are to be ‘loved’, God and the ‘neighbour’ (i.e. not man in general, but the man who meets me time and again in the context of life), but in different ways. The neighbor is to be loved ‘as one like myself’ (not ‘as I love myself’; in the last reality one does not love oneself, but one should rather learn to love oneself through love of one’s neighbor), to whom, then, I should show love as I wish it may be shown to me. But God is to be loved with all my soul and all my might. By connecting the two Jesus brings to light the Old Testament truth that God and man are not rivals. Exclusive love to God (‘with *all* your heart’) is, *because [God] is God*, inclusive love, ready to accept and include all love. . . . [God] limits himself in all his limitlessness, he makes room for the creatures, and so, in love to him, he makes room for love to the creatures. (*BM&M*, 50-52)

I submit to you that Wesley anticipated much of Buber’s relational understanding of human existence by two centuries. For Wesley, all of this flows from the biblical doctrine of the human being as the creature created and called to become the image of God. That is to say, we

are created by God who is Love that we might freely receive that love and reflect that love generously to all of God's creatures, human and otherwise. We human beings are created for one another. "God has strongly bound us to each other," Wesley observed, and surely here we find the root conviction of a relational theology of what it means to be human. God has "strongly bound us," indeed, "in the original constitution of our nature." It is not difficult to imagine Wesley's mind drifting to the opening chapters of Scripture, to Genesis 1 where we read that God created *adam*, the earthling, as male and female in God's own image. Or perhaps he reflected upon Genesis 2, where the Holy One observes that "it is not good for the human to be alone." In both creation stories, a crucial point being made is precisely that "God has strongly bound us to each other"; in that case, Karl Barth and many others are right to suggest that at least part of what it means to be created in God's image is that we human beings are created *alongside* one another, created for *relation* with one another, created for receiving love and sharing in love. In the words of contemporary Presbyterian theologian Daniel Migliore, "The existence of human creatures in relationship . . . reflects the life of God who eternally lives not in solitary existence but in communion. Thus the image of God . . . expresses self-transcending life in relationship with others – with the 'wholly other' we call God, and with all those different 'others' who need our help and whose help we also need in order to be the human creatures God intends us to be" (Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 141).

I continue to be struck by Wesley's injunction that we "always remember the kindred between man and man," which he calls the "happy instinct" of our being – and our being is precisely a "being strongly bound to each other." It is obvious that we do not "always remember" this sense of connection, of kindred, of relatedness that binds every human being on the planet to every other human being. We may not even believe it is true. But Wesley certainly did, and I think he did because he believed Scripture taught him this truth, and because he had experienced its truth in his own life. If it is "in the original constitution of our nature," then presumably we should all be more clearly aware of this sense of kindred. But there is something wrong. Very

often we suppress this sense of “kindred between ourselves and others,” probably because it demands too much of us emotionally, economically, religiously – and who knows how else – if we do not suppress it. It is certainly in the interests of every nation to suppress this sense of kindred, at least to some extent, and especially at certain times.

Wesley believed that the church, as the community of Jesus’ disciples, is called to something different, to something truer to “the original constitution of our nature,” the fundamental reality of our being “strongly bound to each other.” But I think as I near the end of my time, I see one nagging word for us to consider. Wesley encourages us not simply to “remember” the sense of universal human kindred, but also to “cultivate that happy instinct,” which would suggest our need and our responsibility to do something, or some things, that would rekindle a certain feeling for the other, a certain sensibility that is inherent “in the original constitution of our nature.”

So, if we were to decide that we do wish to “go and do likewise,” what ought we to do in order to cultivate this happy instinct of our deep kindred with all people?

There is no question that Wesley believed that this “happy instinct” needed to be healed and restored through the transforming grace of God through Jesus Christ, who suffered great violence himself and was raised from the dead with the scars on his glorified body. We need continually to return to Wesley’s emphasis upon the real possibility of “Christian perfection,” or perfection in love for God and neighbor *in this life* as the work of this wounded divine grace within us. But for Wesley this is not something we achieve in our own efforts – *and yet*, and yet, our efforts are required by God. So, for example, in his pair of sermons entitled “The Witness of the Spirit” he preached that to love God with all our being and our neighbor as one like unto ourselves is not possible for us unless and until we *know* that God loves us. Further, we cannot know that God loves us unless and until God’s Spirit “bears witness” to us, granting assurance of this love. Thus, we deeply need the Spirit of God’s Son crying out in our hearts, “Abba! Father!” in order truly to love the God whom Jesus loved and loves. In Jesus, God has become our Neighbor,

drawing near in suffering love and crucified compassion to heal our hearts, our wounds, our fears . . . in order that we might love. That is *grace*.

But, on the other hand, Wesley wrote that we must cultivate our hearts and lives to be receptive to this pure, unbounded Love; further, he practiced specific methods of cultivation with his Methodist people. We still have much to learn here.

One of the important ways in which Wesley believed and expected God's grace to touch us, to heal us, toward the possibilities of love was through the class meeting system. The Methodist folk were organized into class meetings for weekly times together. Here these seekers after a holy life of love would gather for mutual encouragement and accountability, to confess their sins and shortcomings and to pray for one another. I think Wesley knew, perhaps at a deeper level than the intellectual, that as people drew near to one another in these meetings, as they truly became neighbors one to another, they were receiving the healing grace of God that might liberate them to love even more freely – to love not only their neighbors in their class meeting group, but also the stranger and perhaps eventually even the enemy. Wesley spoke not simply of “social holiness” but of “social grace,” that is, of God's loving, active, healing presence *mediated* and *flowing through* others to us and through us to others. For example, in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* Wesley wrote, “Although all the graces of God depend on his mere bounty, yet he is pleased generally to attach [those graces] to the prayers, the instructions, and the holiness of *those with whom we are*. By strong, though invisible attractions, he draws some souls through their *intercourse with others*.” The notion of social holiness Wesley espoused demands a corresponding notion of social grace. We begin to learn to love as God loves when we experience that love through the love of one another in the church, Christ's body. Thus, for Wesley our shared life together in local congregations, and particularly in small groups for prayer, encouragement, accountability, confession and forgiveness, is a powerful means of grace.

But equally Wesley would teach us that we cultivate that happy instinct of the kindred connections among all human beings by visiting the poor and the sick. This is difficult for many of us, I suspect, because we feel woefully inadequate to the depths of human need and because exposure to the raw suffering and struggle of others reminds us too much of our own pain. But Wesley insisted that serious Christian disciples will choose to engage in what have been called “the *works of mercy*.” Wesley wrote that by participating in “the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of others . . . we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that [the works of mercy, such as visiting the poor and the sick and the imprisoned, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless] are real *means of grace*, although this is not commonly adverted to.” In other words, Wesley taught that we can cultivate this happy instinct of empathy for others who are suffering only by actually placing ourselves into real physical proximity with them in their suffering – and that doing so actually provides a means for God’s transforming Spirit to work deeply in our own lives and histories of suffering and struggle. This is counterintuitive. I know myself I would rather retreat from suffering, whether that of others or my own. I would prefer to repress it, deny it, somehow live above it. And by doing so, I (and perhaps you) wall myself off from the places within where God’s healing love most desperately is needed.

In his sermon “On Visiting the Sick” Wesley plainly observed, “One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that, according to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it; and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart. ‘Indeed, sir,’ (said a person of large substance), ‘I am a very compassionate man. But to tell you the truth, I do not know any body in the world that is in want.’ How did this come to pass? Why, he took good care to keep out of their way. And if he fell upon any of them unawares, ‘he passed over on the other side.’”

This is why Wesley in correspondence with a wealthy woman who wanted to follow Jesus insisted that she actually go and visit the poor in their simple, and often quite desperate, abodes. She wrote back that perhaps it would be enough for her to send money. And while that is a cut above simply passing by on the other side of the road, it still misses Jesus' call to draw near, to become a neighbor, to expose oneself to the wounds and hurts of others. And so Wesley wrote to this woman, "I find time to visit the sick and the poor; and I must do it, if I believe the Bible ... I am concerned for you; I am sorry you should be content with lower degrees of usefulness and holiness than you are called to" (Letter to J.C. March, 10 December 1777). Wesley believed, then, that we must choose whether or not to avail ourselves of the grace offered to us precisely through the lives of the poor, the stranger, the forgotten. "I was sick and you visited me."

And so also we may read in Wesley's journal of a day spent trudging through the snow in London's streets, in his mid-80s, going from door to door to collect alms for the poor. Mid-80s. January. Snow. Begging.

Who proved to *be* a neighbor to those in need? May we indeed go and do likewise.