

## **That They All May Be One**

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18

Matthew 22: 34-46

John 17: 20-22

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### *Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18*

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

### *Matthew 22: 34-46*

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

### *John 17: 20-22*

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.

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"Don't talk to strangers." That staple of childhood safety and self-defense lessons is one of the first we learn, and one that we have heard—and most likely repeated--often.

We are immersed in plenty of news stories every minute to be aware of the problems of the world, and that includes stranger danger. We are cautious, careful, around people we do not know and often there are valid and wise reasons. Yet as Ryan Paliato says in his book, *'It's OK to Talk to Strangers: Secrets for Our Children's Success,'*<sup>1</sup> it is time to think differently and to teach differently than we've been taught about not talking to strangers. He says that "if we didn't talk to strangers, we'd never meet our soulmate, a new friend, or potential business partner."

But I believe it is much more than just that. When we at any age, especially as adults, default to not talking to someone we do not know out of fear, discomfort, uncertainty, we miss opportunities to learn about them, who they are, what their life story is. We miss out on knowing our neighbor.

We have been taught the greatest commandment—first as God spoke to Moses, and then as Jesus said to the religious scholar who was testing him, and of course, to all of us, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But we wonder what to do when our neighbor is a stranger. How do we love, how do we relate, how do we connect, when our neighbor is a stranger?

Today, on Ukama Sunday, we affirm and celebrate our connection with the UCC Zimbabwe, and our sister church partnership with the Hatfield Church in Harare, as we walk together in faith to serve together in ministry among God’s people. We are neighbors 7700 miles and six time zones apart yet despite the distance we live together into God’s desire that to love God is to imitate God. This is how we are holy, no matter where we are, or where our neighbors are. What separates us also opens our minds, hearts and imagination to see the Imago Dei, the image of God, across miles and lands and languages. Loving our neighbors as ourselves reflects God in our lives. We see this divine command as the answer to the questions: What kind of world do you want to live in? What are your best wishes and hopes for the future of the world, our country, this city? What do you pray for when you look at everything that is happening today?

Loving our neighbor—those known to us and those who are still strangers—means wanting a world rich with human dignity and respect for one another. It means we strive for a world in which people come first, a world in which principles and policies support people rather than agendas. It means we aim for a world in which diversity and difference are celebrated rather than oppressed, a world in which people and nations are at peace with themselves and one another. We want a world in which everyone has living wage employment, educational opportunities, access to healthcare, safe and decent housing; enough to eat.<sup>ii</sup> We want the world that Jesus speaks of through John’s Gospel, that they may all be one, whether known or a stranger, grounded in the unity of love between Creator, Christ and Spirit. ‘That they all may one’ is Jesus’ vision of his followers living out the gospel, and it is the scriptural soul of Ukama.

That we may all be one, that we love our neighbor as ourselves, that we seek a just world for all, is our prayer, and the message shared with us in ‘The Blessing Zimbabwe’ video.....  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OA1tVs7VNcY>

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<sup>i</sup> Paliano, Ryan-<https://www.amazon.com/Its-OK-Talk-Strangers>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://interruptingthesilence.com/?s=matthew+22>