Luke 5:27-32 *Play: Opening Your Heart and Your Home to Your Neighbor*

***Gladys Zweifel***Elder Doug Siepkes and I went out Thursday to take communion to some members of our church who are not able to be at Sunday morning worship service. And one of the people we visited was Gladys Zweifel.

Gladys turned 100 years old this summer. She lives in an assisted living complex in Spirit Lake. And I told Doug that we needed to schedule her visit last, and try to be there around 3:00, because Gladys was going to insist that we stay for coffee and cookies.

Gladys is amazing. She is full of energy. She entertained us with stories. She pointed out her walker and told us that every morning she takes it for a run. She may not have meant that she literally runs, but she did mean that she takes it up and down the hallways at a brisk pace and people know they need to stay out of her way.

And she made sure that we had coffee and snacks. We got there at the same time as Ray and Shirley Ohrtman—Shirley is Gladys’s youngest sister. She knew Doug and I were coming, but not Ray and Shirley; but that didn’t bother her. She set out two more place settings, rustled up some juice, and made sure we all had plenty.

She apologized over and over again that she didn’t have time to bake cookies. Instead, she had graham crackers spread with a homemade frosting. It was delicious. She told us it was made from powdered sugar, butter, lemon juice, and cinnamon. She told us it was a new recipe. Now, think of that, 100 years old and she is still trying new recipes.

I’ve dropped in on Gladys before without calling ahead, and I’ve told her I didn’t have time to stay for coffee and didn’t want her to put herself out, and she was absolutely crushed. She loves to entertain. She loves to serve people. She loves to make people feel at home.

Gladys has the gift of **hospitality.**

The biblical word *hospitality* comes from two Greek words, and it doesn’t mean what people generally think it does. The Greek word ***phileo*** is a word for “friendship or brother, almost family.” The first part of the word hospitality connects with the word *phileo.* The second half comes from the word ***xenos*,** which means “stranger, foreigner, alien or even enemy.” In other words, hospitality is a spiritual ability to make a stranger, a foreigner, someone away from us, feel like they are part of the family. (The Neighboring Church, p. 103-104)

Gladys has the gift of hospitality. I’m not sure I have met anybody with a stronger gift for hospitality. And I would encourage any of you who find yourself in Spirit Lake with a little free time to stop by and visit Gladys, she would love to have you.

But whether you have the gift or not, hospitality is something we are all called by the Bible to practice. **1 Peter 4:9** says: “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” Especially when it comes to our neighbors, we should make a practice of sharing our homes, our food, and our time with them.

***Review***We are continuing in our series called “The Neighboring Life.” We are considering the idea that when Jesus told us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, He probably meant our literal neighbors. And so we are talking about what it means to be good neighbors.

And there are four practices of neighboring that we are looking at. They are four words that are easy to remember because they rhyme: Stay, Pray, Play, and Say. Already we have talked about Stay and Pray. We want to be people who stay present in our neighborhoods and get to know the people around us. And we want to be people who pray for our neighbors, talking to God on our neighbors’ behalf.

Today, we are going to talk about **Play**. And really, what we are talking about is hospitality. We want to **be the kind of people who open our hearts and our homes to our neighbors.** Make time and space for your neighbors. Throw parties.

And today’s sermon is going to be a little different. I’m going to do the first part: I’m going to talk about the idea of hospitality. And then, Kim Smith, our children and family ministries director is going to do the application. Kim also has the gift of hospitality. She is good at throwing parties. So I thought it would be good to hear from her some suggestions for how to engage your neighbors in play.

***Levi’s Party***So, first, the idea. The big idea today is simply this: **Jesus likes it when we socialize with people who don’t know Him yet**. Jesus wants us to mix with friends and neighbors who are not Christians. Jesus likes a good party. Here’s our Bible story, from **Luke 5:27-32:**

**27**After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, **28**and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

**29**Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. **30**But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

**31**Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. **32**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

So Levi, who is also known as Matthew, probably the author of the first gospel, becomes a Christian while working as a tax collector.

You may have heard that tax collectors were not real popular back then. They aren’t particular popular now either. But an Israelite who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman Empire was considered a traitor. He had essentially sold out his countrymen for the chance at a fatter bank account. Plus, tax collectors were notorious for charging more than was required and keeping the extra for themselves. Tax collectors were considered to be amoral, greedy, and without conscience. Once you became a tax collector you gave up all hope of associating with the respectable members of society.

But now, Levi has an encounter with Jesus that radically transforms his heart. When Jesus calls Levi we are told that he “got up, left everything and followed him.” He gives up his license to steal. Walks away from his cash. Turns over a new leaf.

But Levi does not forget about his friends. Because of his profession, Levi has developed quite a network of relationships with people who have been shoved to the edges of society: other tax collectors, prostitutes, drunks—your basic ‘sinner’ class. Might there be a way to introduce them to Jesus?

You see, as Christians, we have a problem. We have a tendency to associate only with other Christians.

We preach about community here at the church, and we encourage participation in small groups and other activities where we can spend time together, and we know that most of the people who go to church are likely to share the same values that we do; so we do most of our socializing within the church. If you grew up as a Christian, like I did, it is likely that most of your friendships are with people who go to the same church as you. And if you didn’t grow up a Christian, but found Jesus later in life, there can be a not-so-subtle pressure to trade in your non-Christian friends for Christian friends because those old friends represent life before Jesus and they could be a temptation to fall away.

So now that Levi has walked away from his tax collector’s booth, the question is whether he is going to walk away from his friends as well.

But not Levi. He’s found something amazing in Jesus. He has had his life transformed by Jesus. And now he wants his friends to know Jesus too.

So what does he do? He throws a party! He invites everybody he knows, everybody who is willing to be seen with him. And then he invites Jesus too. You can almost hear the thoughts running through his head: “If I can just get my friends where Jesus is…if they can just hang out and see that Jesus and his disciples are pretty cool, pretty down-to-earth guys…if they can just talk to Jesus and see what He’s all about…maybe they’ll have their lives changed like mine has been changed.”

So that’s what he does.

And I have a feeling this wasn’t like a bible study where everybody was seated in rows while Jesus stood up front and talked (you know, kind of like this). This was a party. Luke calls it a “great banquet.” There was a “large crowd of tax collectors and others eating with them.” I imagine this looked quite a bit like our Trunk-or-Treat is going to look tonight, minus the costumes. It might even have looked like a street dance outside a bar at 15 minutes after midnight on Flag Fest weekend.

The real clue as to the festiveness of Levi’s party is found in the reaction of the Pharisees. The religious snobs and critics just can’t stand how much fun it appears that Jesus is having. They stand on the sidelines and whisper to anyone who will listen: “Doesn’t Jesus realize what kind of people these are? Doesn’t he know how bad this looks?”

When word gets back to Jesus, He has a ready-made answer. He basically says: “Where else should I hang-out? I’m a sin doctor. I’m here to help people with their sin. Doesn’t that mean I should spend time with sinners?”

And I imagine that Jesus was proud of Levi as well. Levi was not content to leave behind all his old acquaintances and join a holy huddle. Levi saw the value of mixing his old friends with the new.

So what about you? Is there room in your life for your neighbors who don’t know Jesus? Are you willing to socialize with people who do not go to church? Levi had the advantage of being able to invite Jesus—in the flesh—to his party. We can’t do that. But the Bible does call us to represent Jesus here on earth. We are supposed to be salt and light. Can we open our hearts and our homes to our neighbors?

Bill Hybels writes this, in his book **Contagious Christianity:**

Salt must touch something to have its effect; likewise, the doctor has to find ways to spend time with people who need his services. You’ve got to seize opportunities to rub shoulders with irreligious people if you’re going to reach anybody. (p.108)

Hospitality. Play. Jesus likes it when we socialize with people who don’t know him yet.

So now Kim is going to come up and give us some thoughts on how we can be hospitable to our neighbors.