

Today we will focus on the second part of Jesus’ response, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Again this verse comes from the Old Testament, from Leviticus 19:18.

Today I want to tell you about another church member and friend, Margaret. Margaret was a member of the Rocky Springs Church down in Laurens County. She and Robert and son, Kevin, were faithful members of that congregation. Margaret was a teacher’s aide in one of the elementary schools in Laurens. But her “real” work came after school was over. Almost every single afternoon, Margaret left school and went to visit shut-ins and others who needed a listening ear and a comforting presence. She often made two or three visits in an afternoon. Sometimes she took food that she had prepared the night before. Members of our congregation and people in the community loved Margaret’s visits. She was totally present to them and attentive to any needs they had. And Margaret was always conscious of informing me of needs that I might never have learned about if she had not informed me. No matter how many pastoral visits I made in a week, Margaret usually equaled me or surpassed me. What a gift! Having Margaret in our congregation was like having an Associate Pastor for Visitation.

What prompted Margaret to make those visits? Her faith did. She took very seriously those words of Jesus that we are to love our neighbors.

What about you? How do you show your love for your neighbors? Margaret’s ministry was visitation. Yours may be something different. You may show your love for neighbors by making phone calls to those who can’t get out. Or you may gather and distribute food in one of the food banks in the area. Or maybe you can provide transportation to doctor’s appointments or even hair appointments to those who can’t drive any longer. Find something you enjoy doing and you will find that loving your neighbor brings joy and satisfaction to your life as it did to Margaret’s.

And, finally, ponder these words of Wayne Muller:

We live in our body, and we live in the presence of the bodies of others. We cannot have a spiritual life that is completely separate from our corporeal selves. We need to see one another, to touch and be touched, to exchange some gift, some energy, some knowing that can be transmitted only in the physical body, from one to another. It is tangible, yet mystical; physical, yet immeasurable, invisible.

Prayer:

We long to reach out to our neighbors in love, O God, but that is especially hard during these times in which we live. Give us new vision and insight about how to love our neighbors in these times in which we are living. Amen