

## Our City the Assignment Week 4

Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

Our world is broken. In our world, you'll find people hurting, sick in abusive relationships. Searching for meaning in life. Through unhealthy relationships or drugs or alcohol or the pursuit of money. But brokenness isn't just out there, right? It's not just somewhere. It's actually here in our very own city, in our neighborhood, in the places that we pass by every single day.

And Jesus calls us to be witnesses, not just to the ends of the earth that we'll talk about next week, but also right here in our city. Now, we started this sermon series talking about our stories, right? Our why? For following Jesus. Right? In order to be a witness, we have to understand why we follow Jesus. And oftentimes it's when we recognize the brokenness or sinfulness or pain in our own lives.

That is when our stories about how Jesus changed our lives begin to emerge. And so I asked all of you to think about your stories over the last few weeks, and I asked you to share those stories with me. And several of you did share your stories with me. Now, if you didn't share your story with me, but maybe you've been thinking about it.

Or maybe you wrote out your story or thought about your story, I'll encourage you to maybe this week, share that story with a family or a friend or a coworker, if you haven't already. But I want to share with you some of the stories that were shared with me. People, part of our community, talking about their stories about Jesus.

And all throughout this, all throughout this sermon today, you are going to hear wisdom from others. You're going to hear wisdom from some of these stories that I share. You're going to hear wisdom through a video that I'm about to share later. And, a guest, special guest, that we have with us today. But first, David story and his story.

David is a member of our worship team, and he writes this about his walk with Jesus. David says, in my walk through life, Jesus is there for comfort and appreciation. The comfort is needed in times of loss, bitterness, anxiety, hopelessness, and pain. At some point in my life, we will be facing some trials or tribulations. We need to humble ourselves and just ask for Jesus is comfort and take solid solace in it.

Some of these trials and tribulations don't just go away and will require discipline from you to come back to Jesus. If not, depression can pull you under and be the prevailing thought. Ask Jesus for help. Relief doesn't always work the way we want it to, but I can always feel at ease knowing he's there for appreciation. It's the joys of what God provides, be it the beauty of the ocean or mountains or the people in our lives.

I believe Jesus that is at the center of iron, sharpening iron with Jesus at the center of our relationships. We can glorify him that much more. Piper Miller, part of our staff team, wrote her headline and story. Knowing that life is full of unanswered questions. So Piper's headline is Jesus Loves Us Through Everything, and here's her story. I follow Jesus because he helps me navigate through this world that I simply don't understand or comprehend.

How can we have so much hate? Why do we need to fill ourselves up with so much meaningless stuff? The frustration, the anger, the disappointment we all feel. Jesus is above it. Below it. In the

middle of it. If we reach out to him, Jesus lets me know. I don't have to understand the world. It will never make a lot of sense, but I can look to him and his example.

He is constant, confident and so full of love. Jesus is what I need to walk through this life.

Jen Watson Williams, our care team leader, also newly commissioned, Congregational Care Minister, said this about her story. I follow Jesus because he is the OG Zen master and authority for creating peace, love and positive energy. I thought you guys would like that part. She says I would not have learned to love myself the way Jesus loves me without confession.

A tangible outward expression of bottled up events and emotions. I follow Jesus by quieting my mind, journaling, and always striving to exercise the fruits of the spirit. Then, from Claire Andrews Claire Andrews is a high school student. She's also part of the tech team, and she wrote this for her story in response to what is happening in our country today.

Her headline, Jesus, the One Who Loves and here is her story. She says, I follow Jesus because he loves all and welcomes all. He doesn't pick and choose who can follow him and would never stop anyone from coming to him. Jesus shows us that he doesn't care what society thinks of people or what they have done. He sees their hearts and loves them.

He wants us to do the same, to love and take care of his people. Wisdom. Wisdom. Yeah. Wisdom. Amazing. So the first step of being a witness is knowing our story. Or at least knowing that Jesus wants us to have a story, a reason for following him. And then in this sermon series, we talked about, okay, once we know our story, the easiest place to live as a witness is in our own family.

And we admitted, right. That's hard. That's difficult. Sometimes we're unkind to our family. Sometimes we're the opposite of showing love to our family. Then last week, Jesse Syracuse, he talked about his experience with the Good Neighbor experiment and how to be a witness with your neighbors and your coworkers. And he remind us, it reminded us of how Scripture reminds us that there are lonely people in the world that Jesus cares so much about.

I want to show a video, with you. Up to you today of Mike and Karengreen slate. They were also part of the Good Neighbor Experiment. So take a look at this.

Mike and Karen Greenslate

Hi, I'm Mike Rich slate. This is my wife, Karen. We've been coming to prisons for a year and a half, and we came from California, so we did not know a soul here except our children. We didn't know anybody had horizons. And people were so friendly. We felt like we'd been here for 20 years. And, I think Mary Lou was the first one that came up and gave us a big hug, and we felt so welcome.

So I guess our first neighbors that we had and learned here was it horizons. And so we were perfect to be on this new, system that they had the Good Neighbor experiment. That's ad eight. And there were eight of us from the church here. Horizons and it was a forum. But meeting once a week teach us how to meet your neighbors.

Sounds very simple, but it wasn't. And basically it's a plan, a way to or I call it the map that you can learn about your neighbor, learn about your gifts and their gifts, and you can start some kind of a

learning conversation that would bring you to a point that you can have a relationship with through a lot of classes at Alli, which are for seniors.

But, I met a man that was interested in golf, and I immediately found a connection because we both have a passion for golf. And yet he was so busy with all the other friends for years, I said, I'll never be able to eventually. But the guy said, you know, I'm going to take you around to all the golf courses, just you and I, and we're going to go to all of.

And I learned that your neighbor doesn't have to be the person next door because he lives across town.

When we first joined this, I thought it'd be a great way to meet people, but that easy to learn how to be a good neighbor. Because of our age, we been playing a lot before, and it sounds like something if you're friendly and outgoing, that it's not that hard to do.

But, then I thought about, you know, when someone asked, Jesus, what's the most important commandment? He said, love the Lord your God with all your heart. So with all your mind and your strength. And second most important thing is love your neighbor as yourself. And he said, that's like it. So in other words, loving your neighbor in this life, loving.

And if that's true, then it was a high value that Jesus mentioned the word many times in the Old Testament. To so through the time of experimenting about being good neighbors, learning how to connect with people. We began to discover that I had to reevaluate what I thought about other people because I'm so busy with my life and most of us were raising children, going to school, working, being busy in church, and for me, being busy, pleasing the people in my family, my children, my friends, my husband that I hardly had time to stop and add someone else to my life.

Someone I didn't know especially. Or someone I had to go out of my way to get to know. And so what I learned is that when we started to do this, we practiced connecting and beginning to notice our need, not necessarily the person next door like mindset. But maybe also someone you met just a short period of time, either at work in the course of doing something in the community, like sports with your children.

Maybe it's someone just connected within a store, or you had a flat tire and you helped you. That person is someone that is in your life or short, but this is someone that God loves and values so much. And what I learned is this is someone, perhaps, that God wants you to know why he loves this person. So.

So you come to see people differently and a little more willingness to, reform and reevaluate my time. One of the things that was most instructive to us from this good neighbor experiment of meeting here, horizons, was we have a new neighbor. They're from Japan, and they do not speak English. We do not speak Japanese, which to me is a complete barrier.

And yet, Karen, after being through the experience, what we learned, she went right over and knocked on the door and found out that they have children. And she found out that she could teach me how, who is the mother English as a second language because Karen is skilled in that. And that started our relationship with the bank. And then, as we reported, we borrowed the children for, Halloween.

And we carved pumpkins with them. And they were delightful kids.

Yeah, it's been really fun relationship, of a neighbor that honestly, I think we would've just passed it by because they couldn't speak to us, and they're busy

or busy. You might be seeing someone at church every single week, but you with a learning conversation, like you said, Mike, you begin to learn.

What's that person's gift and how does that connect with my gifts? And suddenly you learn something about that person you never knew before. And that's one thing about neighboring. It's not just about borrowing sugar and being there to use that connection for something you need, but to learn something important about what you both to contribute, even to your environment by knowing each other.

Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

So one thing you learn in the Good Neighbor experiment is who are your neighbors and what is a good neighbor? And one thing we learned is good neighbors are all around us. They are God's people, and God sends them to us that we can learn about how much he loves them, because he really wants us to know why.

Mike and Karen, in their 80s, are still learning what it means to be a good neighbor, still learning what their story is like. I'm going to come back to something Karen said in that video later in my message. But I also just want to say, you know, they are part of the experiment, too, in this class was, one of the first steps was to borrow something from a neighbor and.

Right. We're all thinking like, okay, like a chainsaw or a cup of sugar and they like, texted our group. We borrowed our neighbor's kids, and it was hilarious. We're like, I don't know, okay, that was great. And it worked out. But yeah, yeah, think outside of the box. So when we know our story of Jesus, when we know what the commands are and why we choose to follow Jesus, it becomes a lot easier.

It becomes easier to share it with our family and friends and neighbors and coworkers. But what about those people we don't have relationships with? How do we represent Christ to the people we don't know yet? The ones outside of our usual circles, those who may never step into a church or step into our lives in other ways. How do we first step toward them?

And is this exactly what it means to be a witness when Jesus says, go and be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, is it about taking a step toward someone? And what about the story of Jesus can speak to the brokenness of our city? Some of you might remember, early when we started our vision process here at horizons.

I brought to you a statistic about North Lincoln. And the statistic was this South Lincoln residents, on average, live 15 years longer than North Lincoln residents. Now, that statistic came from a collaboration with Place Matters, which is a national initiative, finding injustices in cities and connection with the community health endowment of Lincoln. And they came up with this statistic.

And I don't think that I've ever said anything in my sermon that has been repeated back to me so many times and by more people than this. Right. People were shocked by this, and people asked, what can we do? What can we do? What can horizons do about this injustice that is in our city now?

That is one of the many reasons why we connected with the connection point, which is located north of here.

Now, what I love about the connection point, our partnership with the connection point, there's so many things I love that for many of us, we're getting out of our comfort zone. We're going into a neighborhood that we don't often visit. But what I'm cautious about this partnership and any partnership that we have within other organization outside of us is the fear.

I have a fear that it becomes, us and them and I don't. Right. That's not that's not, that's not it because it's an US thing. It's our city. It's our brokenness. It's our responsibility. It's not an us and them thing. So we do this together through our mercy and our justice ministries. Because if we don't really care for that, there's brokenness in another part of our city.

Maybe it doesn't exactly affect us directly, and maybe we're like, I don't know what to do. So I'm not even going to worry about that brokenness in another part of the city, then we may be or we actually are missing the point of what Jesus is calling us to do. See, there's a story in Luke chapter four. You probably know it.

It's the story when Jesus visits his hometown in Nazareth and he visits the hometown, and he and he gives a message, right? And then what? What happens? He's rejected. He gives the message he's rejected. And usually we focus on that. What does it mean that Jesus was rejected from his hometown? But what we miss is Jesus giving his job description the reason why he came.

So Luke chapter four, verses 16 through 21 Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised on the Sabbath. He went to the synagogue as he normally did, and stood up to read the synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.

He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him, and he began to explain it to them.

Today this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it. Now did you catch it? Did you catch where? Jesus said, The Scripture has been fulfilled, and I have been sent here to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners, to, to, to recovery, sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed. There's Jesus's job description.

That's why Jesus was sent here on earth, and now that's our mission. That is what we are now called to do. I'm going to invite, Pastor Katherine Ebling-Frazier up here, and she's part of the connection point. She's been here before, so maybe you remember her, but, she's going to talk a little bit more, with us today.

Pastor Katherine Ebling-Frazier

It's a joy to be with you guys today. I'm glad to be back. First, I want to thank you. Cans of compassion. You guys did amazing. We have cans for days and days and weeks and weeks and months. That connection point. And that is a huge blessing to us. But today I'm here to talk about even more.

At connection point, I mentioned the first time I came about 75 to 80% of our friends are refugees and immigrants. And as I was thinking about what your pastor was going to share today, I thought about Isaiah 61, this portion that you shared, this job. Jesus's job description is pulled from this older passage in Isaiah 61 says something interesting.

It says this. Our job is to comfort all those who mourn, to give a crown of beauty and place of ashes at connection point. Our refugees oftentimes come from all around the world, but the main places that I'm experiencing them coming from right now would be Syria, Afghanistan, the Ukraine. If you were to Google those places. Sadly, I did this before I came.

You actually see ashes. You see parts of their cities that have been laid to waste, and in the families that we've begun to host at connection Point, I've learned that it's not just those pictures online where this is happening, but it happens in real people's lives that live here in Lincoln and now are a part of our community.

One of the families that we sponsor has ten people in it. They have eight kids, and they had to come here because their school was bombed by the Taliban and their dad's brother, their uncle was killed by the Taliban. And so they're now here trying to remain safe. Another family. We help a mom and her six daughters. They're from Kurdistan.

And her dad died in a car wreck. And all that was left was the rubble. And then there's a group of moms from the Ukraine that that always come together with lots and lots of their children. And you know what? I can't find the dads, and it's safe for me to imagine and assume that many of them are still back fighting in the Ukraine.

You see, there are people in our community, these refugees and immigrants who really need to know and have a sense that there is beauty even in this time of mourning, and that God is still near. And I think what's interesting about the passage that we shared today is it says we're called to share the good news. Growing up in a conservative church, I thought that meant to have people like, you know, say, I believe in Jesus.

Like if they say, those are good, those three words, they're good. And that's not at all a waste. But in the situation that we're in with these refugees and immigrants; the good news looks a little different. These are real examples of how I've seen host churches being and sharing the good news. The good news for them is a grandpa figure installing Wi-Fi and a TV on the wall, and a ring camera for the family where there was no mail in their family.

The good news is having tea and bringing over a sewing machine and teaching English to a mom who's left everything she knows behind. The good news is taking time to drive a family to the health department to get their vaccines so they can apply for a green card as soon as possible. In this political climate. And today, I'm here to ask you guys if you're willing to help share that good news.

I am in need of a group of at least 4 to 6 people, but if we get more, we can figure out what that means to host and walk alongside our refugee families that come to connection point. I'll explain more what this means. All you're signing up for is an informational meeting where you'll learn about how to do this, but basically it looks like showing them around Lincoln, helping them have a friend and an advocate, someone that reminds them that they're not alone here.

If that sounds like something you would want to do, I want to challenge you to see if you want to sign up right at that table with me after church. But what I found in this work and Mandy said it very well. We realize this is not just a them problem, but this is an US problem. I have areas where there is there, there are ashes, there is rubble in my own life.

And I imagine you guys can relate. And I've realized that as I go visit with my friends that are refugees, they are making beauty and the places where there's ashes in my life. Have you ever felt insecure if you were good enough, or if you're needed, or if you could rise to the occasion? I have a family where I go and the girls go, Catherine, Catherine.

And they run to the door and give me a hug. They remind me that even when I'm insecure, I'm loved. I struggle with feeling like there's never enough. I don't have enough time. I don't have enough resources. There's not enough good people in this world. And when I go and I sit down at my friends tables, oftentimes they've just come through the food pantry.

They serve me the biggest feasts that I have ever seen. They remind me that there's beauty, and I often am cynical, especially in this political climate. And when I sit with my friends and I'm able to do just one small act of goodness, they remind me that there's hope when we actually just get to know our neighbors. So if you sense that God might be leading you to to join me in this, I join me outside at the table.

But also just remember to be looking for places where there might be ashes, where there's rubble, and see how God is calling you to bring about beauty. Thanks.

Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

You know, I don't know. In my previous church, I was part of, sponsoring a couple refugee families. And, that feeling of insecure or being inadequate. Right. Certainly. Thinking about, the video and reaching out to this, neighbor of hers that didn't speak the same language and, it is intimidating. I, I wasn't planning on telling this story, but, when we first picked up one of the refugee families that we sponsored from the, the airport, I, I there was a it was big enough family that we had to take two cars.

And so I had I took the mom and the youngest daughter and then the another car had the rest of the dad and the boys. And I didn't speak English. I didn't speak her language. She didn't speak my language right. And so trying to trying to tell her that we needed to put her daughter in a car seat.

Right. We had the car seat installed. We were prepared for, you know, this this two year old. Well, this two year old, didn't want to go in the car seat, didn't want to go in the car seat throwing a fit. And I'm trying, I don't know, trying to sign language right my way into to explaining what this means and like why it's there.

But we ended up, the mom just held this two year old daughter and I drove on the interstate from the airport, to their house about 25 minutes. And I ended up getting off the interstate and weaving through town because I was worried right about the safety of this two year old child that was not in the car seat.

You know, I was I'm a rule follower, right? I know about safety. Right? My own kids, they're in a car seat and it was scary for me it was scary for me. And so because we took a little bit, different route, then the dad and the boys, we showed up probably about ten minutes after.

And guess who was scared? The dad that dad was terrified. Where was his daughter? I mean, his daughter and his wife. Right. And I think about like, yeah, I felt inadequate. I was it was uncomfortable. I was trying to explain, but nothing compared to them showing up to the city, not knowing the language, not knowing if they were going to be safe or not.

Was I a safe person? They didn't know? That is fearful. Now I want to go back to the video and I love how Karen in that video she flipped, right? She didn't talk much about how she was a good neighbor and she is a good neighbor. She did amazing things in that experience in experiment. But she flipped, because she's this humble, beautiful servant.

She has this incredible heart. She flipped and said, oh, well, God sends us neighbors so that we can learn how much God loves them. And she said, God really wants us to know how much God loves them, right? Isn't that a beautiful thing? Thinking what it might look like to get to know a refugee family in their story.

And then Claire. Right, the Claire Andrews, our high school student who submitted her story of why she followed Jesus. She said, you know that Jesus sees, people's hearts and loves everyone. And then she said, he what? Jesus wants us to do the same to love and to take care of all of his people. Scripture says, you know, Paul's writing to the church in Corinth and, and Paul says, we are ambassadors representing Christ.

So what does it look like for us to be ambassadors of Jesus in our city? Well, we talked about what it means to be a witness. To be a witness is to make visible what is otherwise invisible in the visible thing might come through those cans of foods that we donated, or clothes that we might donate, or monetary donations.

Right. That's a visible thing, right? If you're hungry and now you have a can of food that is visibly something in their life. But it's not just about donating food or clothes. It's about a change of heart, a change of heart that has compassion for the poor, that has compassion for the oppressed, and that may come through that change of heart, may come through prayer or fighting for justice in our city, or going to the brokenness, witnessing to our city or to people we don't already have a relationship with will only happen if we break that comfort barrier.

It's through understanding a perspective that's not our own. It's through, a conversation, writing in a car with somebody, taking them to a an appointment. It's sharing a meal kind of conversation with someone. It's sitting with somebody who's struggling to get by. That's when our heart begins to change. And that may mean when our heart starts to change, when we start to do these things, it may mean making Jesus visible to others, but it also may mean us seeing Jesus in someone we might not expect.

Let's pray. Gracious God, you have commanded us to be witnesses in our world, in our neighborhoods, in our cities, in our with our families and friends and God. It is hard and challenging. It is easier for God to just, not do anything. It's easier to say, I don't know what to do, but God, you have created the church to do something, to take action.

And as we gather with other people who are passionate about justice or mercy, God, you begin to work through us and there is power in the people when we gather together with, with, with a purpose and God. I believe that you are calling us to do even more in our city and God, only you know what that looks like.

And I will pray that, the people who are hearing this message, who are feeling a tug at their heart, who are feeling the Holy Spirit move within them, consider what it might look like for them in our city to be a witness. God, we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, and sometimes we just let it pass us by.

We don't recognize that the spirit is moving, but God the spirit is moving because God, you want people to know about your love and your goodness and the sacrifice of Jesus. Help us be that witness. And we say all of this in Jesus's name, Amen.