

Love Thy Neighbor

Medicaid Expansion Sabbath | February 2-4, 2024
Resources for Worship Services



Love.

This simple and profound commandment unites diverse people of faith and good conscience. Love of God may be our most important belief, but **love of neighbor is what tells people who we are**. Our actions (and inaction) convey the story of our faith far more than words ever could. Our witness of love is incomplete if we teach it in our houses of worship but fail to live it out in our communities.

Loving our neighbor can feel like an impossible task. There are so many neighbors. There is so much need. Growing divisions and isolation in our communities and around the world can make us fear that, if we're the ones in need on the side of the road, will our neighbors really stop to help? Will they even notice?

Working toward healing in all the world is too big a task for any one of us alone. But showing mercy to more than 150,000 Kansans without access to healthcare is easily within our reach.

It's a bi-partisan issue: a large majority made up of at least 8 in 10 Kansans — Republicans and Democrats — support this decision to help those in need while protecting healthcare resources for everyone, especially in under-served areas. Help us share this Love Thy Neighbor message as a statewide call that our legislative leaders will not be able to ignore!

“What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?”

The legal expert said, “The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

(Luke 10:36-37, Common English Bible)



LOVE THY
NEIGHBOR



ALLIANCE FOR A
HEALTHY KANSAS

February 14, 2024

Kansans deserve access to affordable health care. Let's work together to expand Medicaid in Kansas.



Sacred Texts on Love of Neighbor

The following resources come from a variety of traditions and can be used the weekend of February 2-4, or on any date when a focus on Medicaid Expansion is appropriate.

Jewish Torah Portion-based resources for February 3 can be found beginning on page 7.

Christian lectionary-based resources for February 4 can be found beginning on page 9.

Opening Words

“Peace in the Heart”

If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.

-Taoist philosopher, Lao-Tse, sixth century BCE



Call to Worship (loosely based on Luke 10:25-37)

One: Love is the One who calls us here today!

All: We want to love God with all our heart, with all our being,
with all our strength, and with all our mind.

One: We gather to learn how to bring this love into the world

All: We want to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

One: But who is our neighbor?

All: When we give and receive mercy in a time of need, we are neighbors.

One: Let us worship and learn from the Source of Mercy, how to love ALL our neighbors.

All: Let us worship the One who is the Love we receive and the Love we give!

Creative Ideas for Worship Spaces

Use striking symbols of medical care around your worship space: first aid boxes, hot water bottles, blankets, even a cot or stethoscope.

Try leading worship in a set of scrubs instead of clerical attire! Why are these garments seen as symbols of healing? Why are robes, vestments, etc., not necessarily seen as a symbol of healing?

Pile up reams or boxes of recycled paper, with some enlarged fake medical bills or statements clearly visible, as a symbol of the burden of these bills.

Song Suggestions

“Change” by Tracy Chapman

Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior (Fanny Crosby)

Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life
(Frank Mason North)

“If You Don’t Love Your Neighbor”
by Rhonda Vincent

“Love, Break Our Hearts” by Jason Shelton
([sheet music](#))

Talmud

Another time a non-Jew came before Shammai and said, "I will convert if you can teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai pushed the non-Jews aside with the ruler that was in his hand. The non-Jew came before Hillel and Hillel converted him saying, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor, that is the entire Torah, the rest is just commentary, now go and study."

(From the *William Davidson Talmud*,
Shabbat 31a)

“Trees, Being Neighbors”

by Alison Lurie

Trees, being neighbors all their lives
Must take friends where chance planting gives
The seed soil, learn to choose their loves
Within the changes of their leaves

Believe the botanist who loves
To tell how oak, beech, maple, lives —
Each to take sun as the sun leaves
Grows to the space the next tree gives

In cities neighbor neighbor leaves
And the unhappy move their lives;
When discontent room for room gives
In heavy towers the builder loves.

Let sun recover soured loves,
Let the new spring now spread long leaves,
And grant man may, if man forgives,
Grow rooted to the place he lives.

(Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, June 1947)

Many additional resources from the Jewish tradition can be found at Sefaria, for example at [Leviticus 19:18](#) (“Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord.”) One example is a commentary by Sforno (15th-16th c. Italy) which offers an expanded interpretation of the *Vayikra* (Leviticus) text: “There follows a general, all-inclusive rule to be observed in relations towards one’s fellow, phrased as *ואהבת לרעך כמוך* (love your neighbor as yourself), telling us to apply the same yardstick to our concern for our fellow that we would want applied to ourselves if we were in his shoes in similar situations.”

Children’s moment

Just like adults, children can understand that love means different things in context. Ask kids what love means — you might start with some paper valentines (complete with corny jokes), or candy hearts. They’ll be thinking about school Valentine’s Day celebrations. What does it mean to love their classmates — do they love all of them? What are other kinds of love — love of pets? Siblings? Family members? Kids can understand that these kinds of love are each a little bit different. But how can we love somebody we don’t even know? Love isn’t just a feeling we have in our heart; it’s an action we can take. And sometimes the action comes before the feeling. When we give out valentines, we give one to everyone in the class. Why? Because it’s an action that shows we will try to be kind to one another, even if we aren’t good friends with every single person. And who knows? Maybe those friendly cards will help start a friendship we didn’t expect. Pass out a valentine to kids (bonus points for a healing theme!), and/or give them materials to make a valentine to share.

‘The Neighbor who is a Stranger’

In Islamic tradition, Surah 4 (An-Nisaa’) in the Qur’an widens the concept of the neighbor. Many sacred variations of the Golden Rule, like this one, are careful to expand the idea of the “neighbor” to include caring not only for those we personally know and love, but also for strangers, travelers, and wanderers. Care for the neighbor is often linked to care for widows and orphans, as those in the ancient world who would mostly likely be powerless and vulnerable. Keeping our most vulnerable neighbors healthy benefits all of us; but more importantly, loving our neighbor is the morally right thing to do.

‘Worthy or Unworthy’

Rev. Howard Thurman, a Christian theologian and Civil Rights leader, preached on the idea of the motivation for love of neighbor in his 1951 sermon on the Parables of Jesus. He urges us to define real love of neighbor as something we do without regard for any benefit to ourselves. Full text and audio are available at Emory’s [Howard Thurman Digital Archive](#).

“Worship God [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbor from among your own people, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, and the wayfarer, and those whom you rightfully possess.”

(Qur’an, Surah 4, v. 35,
[Muhammad Asad translation](#))

I deal with the person, not with the fact that he is lovable or unlovable if there's such a word. Not with the fact that he is gifted or not gifted. Not with the fact that he is healthy or unhealthy. Not with the fact that he is worthy or unworthy, that he's kind or unkind.

All of that becomes secondary. The primary thing is that when I say "I love," it means that I'm involved in an encounter that leads from the core of me to the core of you, past all the good things I know about you, all the attractive things I know about you, beyond all of the bad things I know about you.

([Parables of Jesus, Part 5: The Good Samaritan, Oct. 7, 1951](#))

Species Loneliness

Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Potawatomi botanist, author, and professor, offers an insightful critique of the state of human communities as she extends love of neighbor to include our neighbors in all of creation: plants and animals, too. On our lack of relationships, she writes, “Philosophers call this state of isolation and disconnection ‘species loneliness’ — a deep, unnamed sadness stemming from estrangement from the rest of Creation, from the loss of relationship. As our human dominance of the world has grown, we have become more isolated, more lonely when we can no longer call out to our neighbors” (*Braiding Sweetgrass*, p. 203). Denying health care denies the humanity of our neighbors, further isolating us from one another. We don’t just harm our neighbors; our own hearts are also harmed by this indifference and inequality.

A Parable from the Christian Tradition

A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to gain eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?” He responded, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.” But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus replied, “A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days’ worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, ‘Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.’ What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?”

Then the legal expert said, “The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

-Luke 10:25-37 (Common English Bible)

Invite us to be a part of your program!

Speakers from Kansas Interfaith Action and the Alliance for a Healthy Kansas are available to offer sermons, educational presentations, informal gatherings with Q&A, or to meet with a clergy or community group in your area.



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Offering

If you would like to dedicate a special offering for this day or season, please consider supporting the work of [Kansas Interfaith Action](#). You can also support the [Alliance for a Healthy Kansas](#), or give to one of many denominational medical debt reduction projects.

Final Blessing

May our vision be transformed
so that divisions and differences
become beauty in diversity to us.

May the meaning of neighbor
grow as wide as creation,
as far as our statehouse,
and deeper than our fear
or hatred of others.

May the mercy in our mouths
become the actions of our bodies
and the witness of our votes
and our public testimony.

May the call to 'Love Thy Neighbor'
build bridges over political divides,
break down barriers to healthcare access,
and break open our own hearts
for the dignity and hope
of all who suffer.



Closing Prayer (Christian tradition)

Loving Creator, where you see all the beauty in our diversity, we are too often tempted to see differences and create divisions. When we ask, "Who is my neighbor?" the truth is that we are asking who we don't have to help. We can easily come up with reasons why someone else's pain is not our problem. But you simply aren't having it. Being a neighbor means showing mercy, without limits. If we want to love you with all our hearts, that's what our love has to look like in the world. Help us turn our excuses for not showing mercy, into a compass for our actions. Because we love our neighbors... we can find a way to help them despite political barriers. Because we love our neighbors... we can't imagine a world where we support barriers to healthcare access. Because we love our neighbors, we'll cross any divide — a dangerous road, the distance to the Statehouse, our shyness about talking to legislators — to show mercy where it is needed most. Give us courage, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. When the way ahead seems too difficult, remind us that you are always on the journey with us. Amen.

Calls to Action

Be sure to close your sermon or time of worship with an invitation to take the next step!

February 12: KIFA Advocates Monthly Meeting (7pm on Zoom)

February 13: KIFA Clergy Monthly Briefing (11am on Zoom)

February 14: Love Thy Neighbor Advocacy Day at the Statehouse

March 6: 2024 Rally for Medicaid Expansion



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Torah Portion Resources for February 3

(based on Parashat Yitro, 24th of Sh'vat, 5784)

Shabbes as a Radical Practice

One element of this Torah portion is the simple but central commandment to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. When our neighbors are trapped in cycles of medical debt and low-income work or reduced capacity to work, practicing Sabbath is often no longer on the table. We know the physical and mental toll of such a burden, but sometimes we overlook the spiritual or religious toll of forfeiting the practice of sabbath.

Anna Rubin offers a [collection of excerpts for reflection](#) on the meaning of Sabbath in the context of social justice. Our particular focus on the denial of basic healthcare access to more than 150,000 of our neighbors lends even more weight and urgency to these comments.

“In short, the Jewish Sabbath is a day for being, not for making. [...] Doing, working, making are not intrinsically evil. Modernity has made possible much that is valuable. But a society that never pauses to catch its breath and reflect on its values, never pauses to love and affirm community and family. Such a society forms "making" into a grotesque mockery and turns production, consumption, and overwork into idols.”

-Arthur Waskow

A Model of Leadership

The dialogue between Moses and Jethro in this Torah Portion offers another way to look at our role in advocating for healthcare access for our neighbors. [Rabbi Sharon Sobel's commentary](#) broadens the definition of a leader: “When we choose leaders, we must question more than their stances on political

זְכוֹר אֶת־יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy.

כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ
אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ
יְהוָה אֶת־יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ {ס}

For in six days יהוה made heaven and earth and sea—and all that is in them—and then rested on the seventh day; therefore יהוה blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

-*Shemot* (Exodus) 20:8, 11

The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006



issues. We must ask, Do they have the necessary qualities to work with others to make this world a better place? Yitro also provides us with excellent models for creating relationships, which will enable each of us to be leaders in our everyday lives vis-à-vis our families, our colleagues, and our community.”

וַיֹּאמֶר חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו לֹא־טוֹב הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה:

But Moses' father-in-law said to him, “The thing you are doing is not right;

נָבֵל תִּבָּל גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ כִּי־כִבַּד מִמֶּךָ הַדְּבָר
לֹא־תוּכַל עֲשֹׂהוּ לְבַדְּךָ:

you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.

-*Shemot* (Exodus) 18:17-18

The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006

A Model of Leadership (continued)

Rabbi Sobel's words apply not only to choosing legislative leaders or local officials who will enact just policies, but also challenge us to ask what role of leadership each one of us is called to step into on behalf of our neighbors who need our advocacy and support. No one person can be asked to accomplish this work alone; but together, we have the potential to finally overcome a major barrier to healthcare access in our state.

A Prayer for Shabbat Tzedek

Rabbi Neil P.G. Hirsch and Dr. Koach Baruch Frazier prepared [this resource](#) for a "Shabbat of Justice" with the weekend of Martin Luther King Day in mind. However, as we continue to follow the story of the Prophet Moses in this Torah Portion, and as we engage in the very same kind of advocacy as Rev. Dr. King (confronting economic injustice and demanding equal access to basic services), it seems appropriate to use this prayer as inspiration for our Love Thy Neighbor Sabbath.

Help us to see, to hear, and to know the injustices that keep us from redemption. Like Moses who comes upon the burning bush, make it so that we cannot look away.

Enable us to hear the voices of our family, our friends, and our community members when they tell us how they are oppressed.

Grant us wisdom and compassion to eradicate the experience of the captive, so that we are all free. Give us courage, energy, and humility to embrace those among us who we too easily label as "other."

Let us transform other into one another. In so doing, we bring justice and healing to our world.

Disturb us from complacency that we may see, hear, and know the experience of the orphan, the widow, the stranger who dwells among us, no matter how you identify, those who live in poverty, the unhoused, the newly immigrated, the person who thinks and speaks differently than us, anyone who could otherwise remain unseen, unheard, or unknown.

Lectionary Resources for February 4

(based on Christian Revised Common Lectionary for 5th Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B)

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 147: 1-6)

One: Here we are gathered to worship

All: By the One who gathers all who are lost and exiled

One: Here we come to be healed

All: By the One who heals broken hearts and binds up wounds

One: Here we come to learn generosity

All: From the One who gives abundantly to the poor

One: It is good to sing praise to our God!

All: It is a pleasure to make beautiful praise together!

Hymn Suggestions

O Christ, the Healer, We Have Come (Fred Pratt Green)

Healer of our Every Ill (Marty Haugen)

Sweet Hour of Prayer (W.W. Walford)

There is a Balm in Gilead (trad. African-American Spiritual)

Children's moment

Think of a papercut — how much even a tiny cut can sting so that we can't think of anything else. A bandaid might not fix it, but the care another gives in offering something so simple can help us go on with our day. When Jesus healed others, he didn't only take care of the biggest, worst hurts.

Everyone is worth helping, no matter how big or small. A hurt that seems little to us might feel really big for someone else. Hand out two bandaids for each child (one to keep and one to share).

Considering blessing the bandaids with love before you pass them out.

Pastoral Prayer

Divine healer, forgive us and rescue us. We live in a world where sickness is weakness. "Talk yourself out of it. No more sick days. Just work through it." We've forgotten how to take a break, how to take care of ourselves. So it's no wonder we struggle to take care of others. It's no wonder we encounter skepticism about whether everyone deserves just and equal access to healthcare. Sometimes we act like a person needs to be near death before they are worth helping.

But that's not your teaching, Holy One! That's not the abundant life you created us for. And every one of us knows that feeling: the papercut. The sore tooth. The backache. The deep depression. The pain that simply cannot be ignored, that prevents us from really living, really working, really loving, with our whole selves. The pain that seems invisible to others, and makes us feel invisible, too. That can make us feel like we don't deserve a life of dignity.

We know you are a giving and forgiving God, who does not deal in keeping track of what we "deserve," but who loves and heals without limitations. We know you long for us to be healed in every way. Give our bodies, our hearts, and our minds, the healing we need; so that we may go out into the world to seek your restorative and just healing for all our neighbors. May our work and our prayer be lifted up in your name and to your glory. Amen.

Sermon text: Mark 1:29-39 (Common English Bible)

After leaving the synagogue, Jesus, James, and John went home with Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them.

That evening, at sunset, people brought to Jesus those who were sick or demon-possessed. The whole town gathered near the door. He healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. But he didn't let the demons speak, because they recognized him. Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer. Simon and those with him tracked him down. When they found him, they told him, "Everyone's looking for you!" He replied, "Let's head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That's why I've come." He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.

Notes on the Gospel Text

Mark's message is about healing as a central part of Jesus' ministry, and also as a central expectation of how and why a community of faith formed around him. In Mark's Gospel, this is Jesus' very first public act of ministry after his authority has been recognized in his religious community. Right away, as soon as they come into this first house, Jesus' new disciples urgently tell him that Simon's mother-in-law is sick, and immediately Jesus heals her. In Mark's typical style, everything is "quickly, urgently, immediate, right away" (Greek *eutheos*), repeated in each verse, 29-31. Healing is obviously an urgent concern for Jesus throughout his ministry — it's always the thing that happens first, before the teaching. So why does healing take a less-urgent position in our faith communities and culture?

Jesus' first act of healing in the entire Gospel of Mark (arguably second, depending on the interpretation of 1:23-26) is for an unnamed woman. This pattern will continue, as Jesus responds to "unclean," unimportant, or devalued people and enters taboo spaces so that he can offer healing to all. Jesus doesn't have a hierarchy of who is deserving of his care, but in v. 38 makes a point of moving along to other communities so that his healing can spread farther. How is this contrasted with our healthcare systems, which prioritizes access for the wealthy, and where far-flung rural communities especially struggle to offer basic care?

Faith communities can get nervous about engaging in what is seen as political, or even worse, partisan. But to people who are sick and can't access health care, politics and parties don't play a role. At least 8 in 10 Kansans say they support expanding medicaid. As people of faith, healthcare access is part of our belief in care and human dignity for our neighbor. As Jesus makes clear, our neighbor is anyone in need of mercy. Even as we help provide emergency relief for those in need, Medicaid Expansion is a way of helping make sure fewer of our neighbors end up in that place of desperate need in the first place. Legislative leaders have turned a moral issue with popular support into a political bargaining tool, and standing up to this cruel misuse of power is part of our Christian calling to witness to justice.

Closing Hymn Suggestions

I'm So Glad (trad. African-American Spiritual)

Give Thanks With a Grateful Heart (Henry Smith)