

The background image shows two arched doorways set into a red brick wall. The left door is black with a brass knocker and a small brass mail slot. Above it, in the arched transom window, the number '1811' is visible in gold. The right door is made of light-colored wood with a large central panel and a smaller mail slot. A brass door pull is visible on the wall between the two doors. The title 'LIVE AMONG' is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

# LIVE AMONG

*The commission and  
commandment to  
love our neighbour*

BY DR. KAREN WILK

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**JESUS INSTRUCTS** His followers to – in their everyday going – make disciples teaching them to obey everything He commanded (Matthew 28:19)

What did the Lord command? *You shall love your neighbour as yourself.* (Matthew 19:19b)<sup>1</sup>

“Do it and you’ll live,” Jesus says. (Luke 10:28 MSG)

Paul explains, “If you love your neighbour, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law (Romans 13:8b)” “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Galatians 5:14).

James 2:8 affirms that loving our neighbours is the ‘royal law.’

Clearly the command is a ‘biggie’ and thus it shows up in our vision statements, on the wall in our foyers, on the bumpers of our cars and at least occasionally, in a Sunday sermon. But we don’t really do it, do we?

Well, I didn’t. I was too busy planning outreach events and seeker-sensitive worship services to get people (my neighbours?) to come to ‘church.’ I had no time to *love them*. But they weren’t coming and in fact they couldn’t care less so I began to wonder, what if Jesus *really* meant that we were to *really* love our *actual* neighbours?

What if the Spirit was already at work in our communities *for God so loves the world* (which might include my neighbours!)? And what if the church wasn’t the pews, the programs and professional staff, but rather, all those seeking to discover, participate in and bear witness to good news that the kingdom of God has come near?

That could change everything.

Can you imagine what might happen if ‘ordinary’ Christians in their everyday ordinary lives right where they live, began to affirm in their being

and doing, God’s agency in them and their neighbours and began to conform their very lives to this greatest of commandments (Romans 8:29, 2:12)? At some point over a dozen years ago, I felt called and convicted to find out ‘what might happen’ and it has changed our lives. We have been learning to live among and ‘do life’ with our neighbours ever since.

Jesus, it seems, was very intentional about (and criticized for) living among ordinary folk, his Nazarene neighbours for 30 years, then other fisherfolk, women, ‘tax collectors and sinners,’ the outcasts and unclean. He identified Himself as embodying the kingdom of God *among* the people (Luke 17:21). And numerous passages invite us – like Jesus – to do the same.<sup>2</sup>

***It sounds so simple and obvious doesn’t it, just be with and love your neighbours! – but simple is not the same as easy.***

It sounds so simple and obvious doesn’t it, just be with and love your neighbours! – but simple is not the same as easy. We are busy. We are afraid. There are Christendom narratives and defaults that make it difficult for us to embrace new-ancient postures and practices. There are shifts required that challenge our previous attitudes and assumptions – about God, church, gospel, kingdom, ourselves, and our neighbours.

So how do we begin?

By practicing faithful presence as listeners, participants, and guests seeking the peace and wellbeing of that very place and people where God has sent us to remain (Jeremiah 29:4–7). Jesus sends us, “the seventy” (Luke 10) to enter in humbly, vulnerably,

receptively, and graciously to everyday life with our neighbours. As we go for walks, share garden advice, borrow a cup of sugar, care for one another’s homes, pets, kids, enjoy a meal together in a neighbour’s kitchen where all are welcome and included, celebrate each other’s milestones and successes, grieve setbacks and losses – in all these precious moments, if we’re paying attention, we discover God at work and point to God’s kingdom come near.

I point to God’s kingdom come near when neighbours respond with love and care to a household that has recently lost a loved one; when a book-club conversation leads to truth and reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours; when neighbours work together to create a sustainable food forest and when we sit together, sharing stories around campfires, at community potlucks, block parties and fundraisers.

You can too. In fact, I believe the Spirit is inviting all of us to step out of our comfort zones, our church buildings and programs, and take notice because the kingdom of God, in flesh and blood, has moved into our neighbourhoods (John 1:14 MSG).

The question is: How will we receive and enter it – with all that we are and with all of our love? After all, Jesus’ priority, greatest commandment, greatest gift, is *love*.

*Lord Jesus, Your kingdom come, your will be done, – on my block – as it is in heaven, Amen.*

I think I’ll go have tea with my neighbour. ❶

Karen is one of our book club authors. Find our 2023 bookclub lineup on pg. 21.

Dr. Karen Wilk works with Resonate Global Mission and Forge Canada teaching, coaching and practising what it means to discover and join the Holy Spirit on God’s mission in our neighbourhoods. She has been a pastor for 35+ years in Edmonton, Alberta, where she also enjoys being a wife, mom and neighbour.

<sup>1</sup> See also Matthew 22:36–40, Luke 10:27, 28, Mark 12:29–31.

<sup>2</sup> Living Among is articulated in verses such as Matthew 4:23, 18:20; Mark 6:6b; Mark 9:19a; Luke 7:16, 17:20–21, 22:27, 37, 24:36; John 1:14, 20:19; John 1:26, 27; Acts 2:22, 4:12; 1 John 4:9; Revelation 21:3.