

### What Will the Neighbors Think?

I would imagine that just about everyone here has seen the classic TV show “Bewitched” or have at least heard about it. In this case, I don’t necessarily care about the main characters but would like to draw some attention to the neighbors. The neighbors were an “older” couple, Abner and Gladys Kravitz. Gladys was a stay-at-home housewife and Abner was retired. However, Gladys seemed to be spend a good portion of her day worrying about was going on at the Stephens’ house and had her suspicions about Samantha and her extended family. She’d look out of her window to see what she could of what was going on across the street.

Maybe we have encountered some people like Gladys Kravitz in our lives. Perhaps some of them are in your own family. My aunt had a police scanner, so she pretty much knew what was happening in the whole city of Pittsfield. That scanner came in handy one time, though, as she heard that an ambulance had been called to my parents house. She was there before the ambulance. What is your own experience of your neighbors? Chances are it is a little different than what it was when you were growing up unless you lived in a rural area where the nearest neighbors were a mile or two down the road. However, how many of your parents uttered the phrase, “What will the neighbors think?”

Today’s readings, both from the first book of Samuel and John’s Gospel, has the neighbors in an uproar! Can you imagine the looks on the faces of Jesse, his sons and their neighbors when Samuel tells him that God has anointed young David? He passed over all the other sons and settled on David, who wasn’t even brought out for consideration. But when Samuel anointed David, surely there was talk among the family and then what we would

consider the “neighbors” or those around them. I imagine that Jesse would even have the thought, “Who knew? But what are the neighbors going to think that I didn’t even bring him out to be seen?”

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. And we saw what the neighbors did—they pretty much lost their minds? “Wait, wasn’t this man blind from birth? What do you mean he can see? Who did this to him?” They even went after his parents; his parents were so afraid of the neighbors (who apparently had turned themselves into a mini-mob with some church leaders attached) that they wouldn’t reply except to tell them to “ask our son, he is of age.”

Why the uproar? Remember, the prevalent thought at the time of Jesus was that if someone be born with some sort of disability or differently abled, that is must be because of the sin of his parents, grandparents, or one of the ancestors. They had no concept that something could go wrong during the development in the womb or that an illness in infancy could cause something to go wrong. If the family had been transient, the neighbors would have thought that the son was always like this and, obviously, was bearing the brunt of a punishment from God.

They also tried to make Jesus out to be a sinner. As the man became increasingly devoted to Jesus, the neighbors became increasingly hostile to the man. The man tells them that “we know God doesn’t listen to sinners but he has healed me.” They became so enraged that they ran him out of the synagogue. The man, however, didn’t care and when he learned who Jesus really was he told Jesus, “Lord, I believe!”

Whenever we celebrate a baptism or at other times throughout the church year, we have the opportunity to profess our faith. We know that our faith tells us that, even though we are all sinners of some proportion, that we are beloved by God. We are not children of the devil; we are

children of God! We have assurance of forgiveness of our sins if we want it. We love God, we pray, we study God's word, and we want to have fellowship with others who profess this. We choose to live this out in our actions. As Paul told the Church in Ephesus, "Awake, O sleeper, from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Christ will shine on us. We have the promise of the Resurrection, the same Resurrection we will celebrate with vigor, song, prayer and shout of "He is risen, indeed!" on Easter Sunday. We will continue to go out and spread God's word through our actions at the Thrift Shoppe, the Community Table, Franklin Ave. Elementary School, The Food Pantry, the Samaritan Inn, and even Westfield State's "Common Goods." We will offer hospitality to strangers during our Pasta with the Pastor as well as our Movie Night.

The word and work of our church is starting to spread. What if we invited "sinners" in? Will the sinners feel welcomed? What *will* the neighbors think? What *do* the neighbors think? I'm willing to bet that they will see a Christian community who will welcome anyone, no matter who they are, where they are on life's journey, or how big a sinner they are. Let all experience God's loving embrace in our church. Amen!