Greetings and Introduction

What comes to mind when you hear these words?

* Twaweza- Safaricom
* Just Do it - Nike
* Open Happiness - Coca cola
* You need it, We’ve got it - Nakumatt supermarket
* The Pride of Africa - Kenya Airways

 And I could go on and on about different brands. But I have often wondered, **if the Global Church was to have a slogan, what would it be?**

When people think of the Church or Christians, what jumps to mind? What perceptions do people have about the Church? Here are some of the things that people have said.

* Irrelevant and confused.
* The church is after your money but never gives back to society
* Christians are hypocritical. They lack the moral authority to instruct or lead people
* The church? Who cares?
* Very Judgmental and negative.
* The church is oppressive. Too many rules
* The church is intolerant about other religions

These are the things that I hear all the time as a Pastor. Of course, some of us feel that this stereotyping of Christians and the Church is grossly unfair. Not all Christians are hypocritical and intolerant, boring or judgmental. In fact, there are many Christians and Christian organizations that are doing great things – in education, caring for the poor, taking care of orphans, restoring justice and many other things. We here know that we have great people amongst us. That said, the truth is that the world today is increasingly getting suspicious of and hostile towards Christians. We just need to make one mistake or do one wrong thing and the World will come crashing in on us. And while some of their sentiments might be unfair and inaccurate, **perhaps the Church has also contributed to where the society is. Maybe part of the problem is that we have wandered away from our Born Identity – the life that Jesus lived and came to call us to.** Who are we meant to be as followers of Jesus?

We want to learn from scripture, what I call the ‘irreducible minimums’. **If everything else was stripped away, at the core, who will we remain as? Who are we meant to be?** Experiences, events, conversations, have shaped or are shaping who we are, but **we want to look at the word of God and learn about who we truly should be, both as individuals and as a Community.**

I am glad that you are part of this conversation because you will get some insights that I hope would inspire you to continue with this journey and to live out who you are meant to be, so lean in. Some of us are here have probably heard a version of this message, and you wonder whether this is relevant to you, I encourage you to also lean in, because **we need to be constantly reminded about this, so that we cannot just do the right things, but also understand why we do what we do.**

**So, who are we meant to be?** The word **LOVE** has been talked about in different forums, taught on Pulpits like these across the world. Many have lived this out but the World around us is yet to feel its impact. And I am so glad that I am bringing this message to us because I believe that this is such a timely word for all of us, as God establishes us in this community.

You see, one of the greatest misconceptions that the world has, and this includes many Christians, is that **to get to Heaven, we only need to do and say the right things and we are guaranteed eternity**. But the biggest problem with this kind of thinking is that it is based on our own opinions of what is right or wrong, or what is convenient to us. Think about it, Pastor Edgar will pour his heart out teaching about Servant Leadership and how we need to serve one another, but hey, that is inconvenient for you so what do you do, you dismiss it. We even justify that we won’t die because of not serving. Asked to give your money towards the vision; some of us won’t. We even believe we are doing God a favour by not giving because we don’t trust the church, so why waste God’s money. God let me keep it for you.

And maybe that is why **we find it difficult to define what our true identity is as the Church, as Christians because we are all so focused on our “self.** Many of us here have an idea of what the Bible expects of us and the law that we should abide by. But when it comes to living out what we learn, we struggle, or we just choose not to do it.

Let me take us to an interesting conversation that is happening between an expert in religious law and Jesus. **Luke 10:25-36 NLT**

One day the religious expert asked Jesus a question and it is like he was testing his view of ethical obligations of the laws that they lived by. These religious leaders had mastered the Mosaic laws that had been passed on to the children of Israel hundreds of years back. They knew the laws inside out, which is like most Christians, we know what the Bible says we should do and what we shouldn’t. And so, this leader asks a question that he probably knows the answer to or had read about. So, his motive may not be very clear at the beginning, but it will become clear to us as we unpack this story. I mean, look at the question he asks.

**25“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”.**

This is a question that he knew the answer to, he was an expert. Every time I read the Gospels, I love the way Jesus responded with such wisdom and authority to the questions he was asked. Instead of giving the expert the answer, he directs him back to the same law.

Jesus asks the religious leader 26“**What does the law of Moses say**? How do you read it?”

He invites the expert’s opinion – how do you interpret the law? “And he answered,

27“**You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself**.”

The expert’s answer is satisfactory as far as it goes. It is based on Old Testament passages that are fundamental to Jewish life and worship. Jesus affirms that the man has answered correctly, and He even tells him, do these things and you will live. Simple, case closed. Next!

But Luke tells us, The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, 29“And who is my neighbor?”

Luke uses such a strong word here which reveals the expert’s intentions. You see, to him, the law was some kind of contract with God by which he could earn eternal life. He wanted a ‘rule’ or ‘set of rules’ that he could keep and so he could justify himself. The heart of the question **‘who is my neighbor?’** was a way to justify himself by limiting the extent of the law’s demand because he knew that there were people he did not love, and there were people who would be very hard to love. If I may rephrase his words, he is saying to Jesus**, “what kind of person is worthy of my love?”** This man like many of us had interacted with many who were not worthy of his love. His experience had probably taught him that not everyone can be loved the same way. So, hearing the wisdom of Christ, he was looking for a loophole that might give him a **‘get to heaven for free’ card**.

Don’t we also do that. We take the word of God and conveniently justify our actions when His word doesn’t make sense to us or don’t appeal to the season we are in?

Jesus does not answer his question but tells a story that aims right to the core of the problem, and that is the heart of the expert.

30 “**A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road**.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was famous for crime and muggings. It wasn't surprising to Jesus' listeners that He set the story on this particular road.

31 “**By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. 32 A Temple assistant[d] walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side**.

Jesus doesn’t just pick random cities and people. Jericho was a religious city; it was considered to be a ‘priestly city’. It was expected that the Priest and the Temple assistant would pass on that road. And not one, many. So, it is not like they were rushing to start a church service, so they didn’t have time to cater to the wounded man.

Neither of them did anything. They both crossed to the other side of the road and moved on like they had seen nothing. But before we judge them too harshly, let us explore all the excuses they might have had;

* "This road is too dangerous for me to stop and help the man."
* "He might be a decoy for an ambush."
* “I am sure someone has called the Police”
* "I've got to get home and see my family."
* "I'm going to serve at Church I can't get my clothes bloody."
* “If that blood gets in my car, it will take forever to come out”
* "I don't know first aid."
* "What was he doing walking on this road by himself?”
* “Took a picture and post/tagged the IG with very harsh remarks as to why the police aren’t doing their job. #Nairobbery #NotAgain

 But then Christ adds a twist to the story. **33 “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him**.

This was a very awkward scene that Jesus has set before the religious leaders. Jews and Samaritans despised each other racially and religiously. The culture gave the Samaritan plenty of reasons to hate this Jewish man and pass him by. It was so bad that some rabbis taught that a Jew was forbidden to help a Gentile woman who was in distress giving birth; because if they succeeded, all they did was to help one more Gentile come into the world. They often thought that Samaritans were worse than other Gentiles. The Samaritan had absolutely no reason to feel compassion for the wounded Jewish man. But…

34 **Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. 35 The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, [e] telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here**.’

Instead of passing by **the Samaritan loved him with a sacrificial love**. He didn't wait to be asked, he saw the need and it was enough to compel him to action. He also gave his time and his money. He treats the injured man not as an enemy but as one of his own. The question is;

36 “**Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked.37 The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same**.”

This right here is the key to the parable: In asking this last question, Jesus has now placed the religious expert in the story. Jesus changes the question from – **‘What kind of person deserves to be next to me to What kind of person should I be?** It is easy to think of the people in our neighborhood as our neighbors. It is easy to think of our friends and family or people who are just like us as neighbors. But when Jesus told this parable, He asked, “**Which of the three do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by robbers?**” The expert had asked, **“Who is my neighbour – Who deserves my love?”** But Jesus said the real question should be, **“Who am I a neighbor TO?** – **Who can I show love to? What kind of person am I to those near me?”** The Samaritan had shown real love and compassion to someone in need. The experts in the law had looked the other way. **Knowing what the law says is not enough**. To love your neighbor as yourself, you have to put it into practice. You have to show love to those in need. **What kind of Person are you to those near you?**

Why did Jesus choose to illustrate this subject with a priest and a Levite? These were Church leaders. It was a warning to all of us. **There are far too many people who are caught up in the mechanics of religious activity with no true love for those who are near or in need.** The Church today could easily be said to have lost its Identity. **We have become so good at talking about what should be done, that we forget what must be done**. And maybe the reason why people are not coming to church, is not that they are rejecting Jesus, they are rejecting you and me. **The world wants to see how we translate our theology/Faith into practice.**

For the Expert and just like many of us think that the responsibility of loving others is based on geography. But Jesus puts away all the limitations with this story - **we don’t love just those who are near us geographically, but we become neighbors to those furthest from us when we love them, help them, walk with them**. This love is as wide as humanity and not limited by proximity. Love your neighbour as you Love yourself!

When I look at this story keenly, I see that **LOVE**;

1. **Sees distress**: “A Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and he saw him”. If we’re busy and preoccupied with our own schedules and plans, we probably won’t see the needs around us. There could be a coworker who’s discouraged, a struggling friend, or even a family member who needs our help.
2. **Responds with Compassion**: “When he saw him, he had compassion on him”. It wasn’t simply a matter of feeling bad for another person; the wounded man’s helpless condition moved the Samaritan to action. This is the point at which we often retreat, because **stopping to help someone costs us time and effort**.
3. **Responds with Solutions**: “He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine; then he set him on his own animal and went the extra mile by taking the injured man to an inn and paying the innkeeper to care for him. **He solved the problems.** Love your neighbour as you Love yourself!

 Our clarion call is to transform Milimani and other parts of Nakuru with love. You have been sent here at such an opportune season, that the Community around has no option but to change. I pray that people of all religions will walk through that gate because of the love in and from this church. Let your season here in Milimani count for something.

As our mission states **‘Bringing life to the city of Nakuru’**, let us change our world through our acts of love, kindness, and generosity. If we are a group of people centered around Jesus, then we need to be a people who reflect the heart of Jesus in a world that’s broken and hopeless. I want to proclaim on this stage that you will make a radical difference around this area, in Africa and around the world.

But that won’t happen with us coming here on Sunday for 2 hours and be happy that we came to church and that is it. We need to position ourselves. We’re a church that releases people who are compelled by His Love to live out their purpose and change the world. Church happens from Monday to Saturday, Sunday we come to Celebrate and get our briefing and equipping for the week. 2 Hours Christianity is not effective! We need to be ALL loving all the time. Jesus came not only to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom but also to demonstrate the Kingdom. Love your neighbour as you Love yourself!

May we break out of our selfish individual cocoons and be part of a radical community that changes our cities through the power of love. It begins right here! Are there people in your small groups or in the wider church that have real needs? And I am not talking about material needs here. People who are going through difficult times. Maybe they are wounded and lying on their road. Would you be the Samaritan who will cover up their wounds and bring them to church, where they may find hope, restoration and be refreshed.

Do you have eyes to see or are you too busy with other things? May God open our eyes so that we could see that we can change those around us through the power of love. What if our small groups could be places where no one has needs, because we care for each other through the power of love?

Vineyard, this city is ready for the power of love! Romans 8:19 says ‘For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed’. This city is desperate for God’s people to emerge who will change the way things are done in our families, our neighborhoods, and our offices. Are you ready to be a neighbor through the power of love?

PRAYER