

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 5C - Proper 10C
July 10, 2022
Luke 10:25-37

Jesus - the Good Samaritan

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, ". . . 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." " (Luke 10:29, 36-37 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Scripture is very clear that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). That means we are to show him mercy. We are to help him in his need however we can. That's what the Old Testament reading is about.

So why don't we? Why don't we love our neighbor? Why don't we show him mercy? Why do we so often ignore our neighbor and pass by on the other side of the road? And worse, why do we so often add to his grief and suffering? Why do our words and deeds so often injure instead of heal? Why are we so often like the robbers in the Gospel who beat our neighbor and leave him half, or mostly dead? Why do we hurt instead of help? Even in the Church? And just as important, where do we turn when we are beaten and need help?

The answer lies in today's Gospel. A lawyer, an expert in the Law of Moses, asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It's a ridiculous question really. He should have known you can't earn an inheritance. Still, he seems to be interested in heavenly things, so Jesus turns it back on him and asks him what he had learned from all his study. In response the lawyer gave a good catechism answer, "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself." This is the summary of the two tables of the Law. It's short, concise, and accurate.

Then Jesus says something rather surprising, "Do this and you will live." Did he really mean that? Yes. For the Scriptures do teach that if you love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and if you love your neighbor as yourself, then you will have eternal life (Ezek. 18:20-21). Of course, the important word here is "if." If he kept them. If he kept them all. If he kept them all perfectly. Not one slip up. Not one mistake. Not one. Ever. The Law requires absolutely perfect obedience, not allowing even one small infraction.

Jesus' answer, though, leads to the point of the Gospel. For the lawyer, having been nailed by the Law, desired to justify himself. So He asks, "And who is my neighbor?" You see, he wanted a loophole that would allow him to be justified by his own work. He wanted to stand on

his own merits. And if that didn't work, he wanted some excuse to avoid the accusation of the law. We do it all the time. "It's not my fault." "I didn't mean to . . ." "I'm not as bad as . . ." "I did the best I could."

But when Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, we are compelled to realize that we stand condemned. After all, we know that we should love our neighbor and show mercy to him. We know we should help whoever is in need. We know we should forgive others. But the truth is we haven't loved our neighbor as ourselves. We aren't as good as we think we are. And in fact, we're worse.

So when we hear the Law of God declare that we are sinners through and through, when we hear God's Word condemn our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, we start to feel the burden of our sins. When God's Law has its way with us, we feel like we've been beaten and robbed and left for dead. The devil and the world have beaten us and the Law has robbed us of any comfort in our worthiness or works. Sin has wreaked havoc on our lives. We lie there helpless and hopeless. No one stops to help. And it's usually just as well. For the priest and the Levite had only the law to give to the man, and that would have only added to his burden. And the same is true for us. When we lie crushed and beaten, we don't need someone telling us it's our fault, or to try harder, to do better, to put on a happy face. What we need is a Savior.

And what a Savior we have! Like a Samaritan half-breed, the Lord Jesus, God and Man, is the only one who can and does rescue us in our hour of need. And what makes this more amazing, is that He is the very one we hate and rebel against because of our sinful nature. And yet, He doesn't pass us by. He doesn't lay more Law on us. He comes specifically to help us in our greatest need.

You see, when Jesus saw our pitiful condition, He didn't cross over to the other side. The One who was despised and rejected by men went out of His way to come to you, to stoop down, and to bind up your wounds. He is the Good Samaritan and the Great Physician. He washed you and bound your wounds in your Baptism. He pours the healing balm of forgiveness on your wounds through Holy Absolution and His Holy Supper. He even commits you to the care of His church until He comes again. But unlike the Samaritan, Jesus has paid the bill in full. And it wasn't just two silver coins that He paid. Rather it was His very life as He shed His blood for you. He didn't just bind your wounds, He actually bore them as He was nailed to the cross. He actually took your pain and felt it as no one else can as He died the most miserable death of all. Later He rose from the dead to continue healing your wounds. And He will come back for you.

Beloved, you can't keep the Law perfectly, but Jesus did. He kept every jot and tittle. He kept it 100 percent in every way and even suffered the punishment it demands for disobedience, our disobedience. And He gives us the benefits. We don't have to look for excuses for not keeping the law. We don't have to look for loopholes. We don't have to justify ourselves. Because we can't do it anyway. It's impossible. But Jesus does the impossible. Because of His obedience and His suffering, death, and resurrection, we are totally justified in

God's sight. And just as the man who was beaten and robbed did nothing to help himself, so we can do nothing to help ourselves either. But as the Samaritan bound up his wounds and took care of him, so Jesus has bound up our wounds and made us whole. He has done it all from beginning to end.

So during our earthly sojourn, we are crushed by the Law and healed by the Gospel. We are constantly on the road to recovery. It takes a long time for your wounds to heal, and that's why Jesus "has left you in His church wrapped in His bandages of healing and life. He has placed you in the care of an inn-keeper, your pastor, to keep your bandages fresh and clean...to feed you holy Body and Blood meals, the stuff of forgiveness, the medicine of immortality. And He will return for you, beloved. Of that you can rest assured." And while you are totally justified in God's eyes, you won't reach perfect health, perfect holiness in this life, but only in the life to come.

So the answer to the lawyer's original question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", is to be served by the Good Samaritan. You see, we can't *do* anything to *inherit* eternal life. Rather, it's a gift, given freely by the grace and mercy of God. That's the way an inheritance works. It's not earned or deserved, but is a gift from the giver.

Yes, we should love our neighbor and show mercy to him. But too often we don't. Yet, by the grace and mercy of God in Christ, and through the love He has given us and shown to us, we can in turn love God and our neighbor. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). And He showed us what kind of love He has for us when He sent His Son to be our Savior (1 John 4:9-10). Because of His great love, then, we can love others and show mercy. We can show genuine compassion. Our love will find expression in our actions toward those in need. Rather, God's love in us will find expression toward those in need. The Samaritan showed his love by his actions. Go and do likewise. Not to be saved, but because you are saved. Not to justify yourself, but because you are already justified by Jesus Christ, our Good Samaritan. And even more, go and do likewise and be served with the healing mercy of your Good Samaritan. Receive His ministrations whenever you can and rejoice that He will come back for you to take you to be with Him forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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