

Luke 10:25-37
"The Good Neighbor"
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

July 14, 2019
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25b)

This is the question at the heart of today's Gospel lesson.

The man who asked this question was a lawyer. To us today when we read this, we may think of a defense attorney or a prosecuting attorney. We may think of those class action lawsuit commercials about what we deserve. But this isn't the occupation of this lawyer. The lawyer in our gospel lesson is an expert on the Torah. He is an expert on the Old Testament.

In fact, he knows the answer to his own question. So, when he asks Jesus, **"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life,"** this lawyer is just trying to see if Jesus really knows what He is talking about.

Shockingly to the lawyer, Jesus returns his question with a question from Himself: **"What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"** (Luke 10:26)

This is not what the lawyer was expecting. He was expecting to stump Jesus, but now he is the one who has to say the answer to his own question.

The lawyer responds saying: **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself"** (Luke 10:27). Jesus then says to him, **"You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live"** (Luke 10:28).

But, this lawyer wasn't finished. He wanted some retribution. He wanted to justify himself. So, he says: **"And who is my neighbor?"** (Luke 10:29)

But, the lawyer's real question is this: "Who isn't my neighbor?"

[The Parable]

For this lawyer, he had many friends. Chief among his friends would be priests and Levites.

So it was quite a shock to him when Jesus responds to his latest question with a story. It was a story about neighborly compassion. It was a story about friends and enemies. It was a story that was unexpected to a high class Jew.

Jesus then speaks of a man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho on a road that would have been familiar to the lawyer. This road would have been familiar to everyone. You see, this road was dangerous. It was like driving in a bad neighborhood today, everyone knew to keep their windows shut and to keep moving.

So, running into robbers wasn't a shock, but what happened after the robbers was shocking.

One might expect a man of God to have compassion upon a man who was stripped, beaten up and left half-dead on the side of the road, but the priest just passed by. The priest ignored a fellow man.

Then a Levite – an assistant at the temple – did the same.

Why didn't they help their neighbor in need? Well, it is likely they were walking to the Temple in Jerusalem and they wanted to remain ritually clean. You see, if a Jew touched a dead man, that person wouldn't be able to set foot inside the temple for days or months.

These men were more concerned with ceremonial law, rather than God's moral law. They were more concerned with being ritually clean, than caring for their neighbor.

But, then the shocker of shockers, a Samaritan man showed compassion. This Samaritan stopped and went to this man in desperate need. He bound up his wounds. He poured oil and wine upon him. Then he brought this half-dead man to an inn so he could heal from his injuries.

For this lawyer, this was blasphemy. How could a dirty, sinful Samaritan do such a good thing? How is it that he is the one who cared? After all, Samaritans worship God at the wrong place. Samaritans are outcasts from Jewish society.

Then Jesus asks the question: ***“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”*** (Luke 10:36)

The lawyer thought a moment and said: ***“The one who showed mercy”*** (Luke 10:37a). Jesus said, ***“You go, and do likewise”*** (Luke 10:37b).

[We are Dead in our Trespasses]

Now, don't forget the question that ultimately led to the story of the Good Samaritan. Remember, the question was: ***“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*** (Luke 10:25b)

This is what the Parable of the Good Samaritan is all about. It is all about how we inherit eternal life.

So, what in this parable is about inheriting eternal life?

Well, we have this half-dead man lying on the side of the road. He is hopeless. He is stripped. He is beaten. He is bruised. He is bleeding. He is near death. He is us.

This is the point of the parable. We are the half-dead man.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit, we have been beaten up constantly by Satan by giving in to our sinful desires. Satan bombards us on all sides. We are dead in our sins. We are dead in our trespasses. We are on the side of the road bruised, beaten and dying. We can't get up to help ourselves.

But then Jesus shows up. This Jesus who was promised right after the Fall of Adam and Eve. God the Father showed compassion by sending prophet after prophet to tell of the coming Messiah. The Messiah who would rescue us from our foes: sin, death and Satan. The Messiah who remembered us all in our low estate.

We were all destined to hell. That was our inheritance.

But then Jesus came. Jesus fulfilled the Law. He showed us how to truly love our neighbors by taking on the wounds of our sin upon the cross. He died so that we could live. He rose from the dead to show that we, too, would rise from the dead.

Jesus picked us up from the side of the road. He bound our wounds and gave us eternal life. It is only by God's grace that anyone could ever inherit eternal life.

You see, eternal life is a gift. Eternal life is not something that we can earn. Eternal life is given by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[Carried Home]

Some years ago, the Western Oregon's women's softball team played against Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington.

During the course of the game, Western Oregon senior Sara Tucholsky hit the first homerun of her college career. She dropped her bat and started to make her way around the bases.

In the midst of her excitement, she forgot to tag first base. Immediately the first base coach brought the mistake to her attention and she quickly turned around.

To everyone's horror, her right knee buckled. Crying, she tried her best to crawl back to first base.

To make matters worse, Tucholsky's teammates were warned by the umpire that if they touched her, she would be called out. The umpire also said that if her team put in a pinch runner, the homerun would be changed to a single.

Then Mallory Holtman, the opposing team's first baseman, turned to the umpire and asked, "Would it be okay if we carried her around the bases, and she touched each bag?"

The umpire gave the approval. Then Holtman and her teammate Liz Wallace picked up Tucholsky and carried her to second base. Once there, they lowered the injured player and gently touched her foot to the bag. They did the same for third base and home plate.

The Central Washington softball team displayed compassion. They may not have been thinking about Jesus, but they carried their softball enemy home.

Western Oregon went on to win the game, eliminating Central Washington from the playoffs.

[Enemies of God]

Each one of us was born as an enemy of God. But then God showed us compassion by bringing us into His kingdom. He brought us home. We didn't deserve it. In fact, we only deserve eternal damnation, because of our sin.

You see, when we remain in our sin, we die in our sin. We are without hope.

But the Triune God loves each and every one of us for His steadfast love endures forever. Out of God's steadfast love, whenever we repent of our sin of thought, word and deed against God, that sin is forgiven.

We were in the domain of darkness, but through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, He has brought us out of that darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).

In fact, it was at our baptism when God rescued us from that ditch on the side of the road. It was then that all of our sin was wrapped in the righteousness of Christ. We have been given the gift of eternal life.

We are now in Christ's righteousness. In Christ alone, we are sinless. We are reconciled; we are brought back into the Father's love.

It is only you and me that can deny God's love by not following God's just decrees and His statutes (Leviticus 18-19). If we do not obey God's will for our lives, we are choosing not to love God and choosing not to love our neighbor.

But, all the while God loves each and every sinner. He only desires that we repent and thus, love Him in return.

[Do Likewise]

At the end of the story, Jesus asks the lawyer: ***“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers.”*** The lawyer responds: ***“The one who showed him mercy.”*** Jesus says: ***“You go, and do likewise.”***

Jesus is the Good Neighbor. Jesus saved us from sin, eternal death and Satan. Through Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, He has created us anew. We are now in Jesus. We live in His grace!

So, as Jesus showed compassion upon us. We are to show compassion upon all people. This is our calling. This is our vocation. God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbor does.

Now, there are no limits to who our neighbor is. Our neighbor is everyone we meet day in and day out.

The culture would say that compassion is accepting every person's faults. The culture would say that each person is fine in their sin. But that is not compassion, true compassion is caring for one another, lifting each other up and guiding each other to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10).

This is what a true neighbor is. As Christians, we follow the footsteps of Jesus who saved us from death to bring us to His marvelous light. He has picked us up purely out of His grace to freely give all who trust in Him eternal life. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠