

July 10, 2022

Luke 10:25-37

“A True Neighbor”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our Gospel lesson for this morning a lawyer puts Jesus to the test. Now a lawyer in the time of Jesus would have been a person who made the Old Testament Scripture his business. He would have been an expert in the first five books of the Bible and his business would have been applying the law to every day life. Our lesson gives us the context. We read: “And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Jesus perceives the thoughts of the lawyer. He knows what he’s thinking. Therefore he will not give a direct answer to his question. Rather, he will lead him to the conclusion that obeying the law of Moses will not be sufficient to obtain eternal life.

Jesus said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And the lawyer answered him 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.” The lawyer supposes that this is the very heart of all teaching and thinks that there can be nothing higher than this. He does not consider faith in the righteousness of the Savior. And Jesus answers him saying, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” It is as if Jesus is saying to the lawyer, “yes, the commands of God are good and perfect but can you really do the commands perfectly and inherit eternal life by them?”

The lawyer feels the position he has placed himself in and is ashamed of it. He therefore asks another question to justify his evil actions. He asks, “Who is my neighbor?” By asking this question he admits that he has not loved his neighbor as himself. He cannot say that he has kept the law perfectly. He knows that he has failed. Jesus will not give the lawyer a direct answer to his question. Rather, he will lead the expert in the law to the answer by way of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus tells about a man who was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked by thieves who stole his clothing and beat him up so badly that they left him for dead. A priest came along, saw the victim and went on his way. Later, a Levite came along and saw the man, but hurried by without helping him. Then, came a Samaritan who saw the injured man, stopped, poured oil and wine on his wounds, put him on his animal, and took him to an inn where he personally took care of him. The next day, he asked the innkeeper to care for the injured man and paid him for his trouble. If there were more expenses, he promised to reimburse the innkeeper when he came back.

The man who lies half dead, wounded and stripped of his clothing is all of humanity. The murderers are the devils who have robbed and wounded us, and left us for dead. We still struggle a little while in this life, but there is no hope. We cannot help ourselves to our feet and somehow make it. We are for all practical purposes as good as dead. And as we see all the dead around us in this life we are nothing more than priests and Levites who go on our way and hurry along without helping. We need a Samaritan. But who is this Good Samaritan when all are priests and Levites? Luther writes:

In the Samaritan is given to us not only an example of love, but also and especially we find represented the unspeakable grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which He manifested in behalf of the whole human race. Mankind had been stripped by the devil of all

divine knowledge and spiritual gifts, and instead of it had been smitten with blindness, contempt of God, and so on, and thus shamefully wounded and disfigured, so that no fear, love and trust in God remains in the hearts of men, but the very opposite. Hence the Apostle St. Paul calls them “by nature the children of wrath.” From such misery and ruin no creature in heaven or on earth can deliver us.

Indeed! It is crucial to the parable that we understand that the Good Samaritan is first and foremost our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who has shown his true love toward God and neighbor. In obedience to God, he came down from heaven, became one of us, and fulfilled the will of his Father in heaven. As it was toward his neighbor, Jesus was baptized with our baptism and became sin for us and began preaching repentance and the good news of healing in the forgiveness of sins. He did not work that by being centered in himself. Everything he did was in view of his neighbor. Good Samaritans [in the plural] can only be such if they have been touched by Jesus who is THE Good Samaritan.

Samaritans were despised by the Jewish people. Jesus was despised and rejected. Nevertheless, it is the lowly Samaritan who comes to the relief of the one who is lying on the road dying, which is what Jesus does for us. He binds up his wounds and pours oil and wine. Jesus binds up our wounds and pours on his sacrifice for the forgiveness of all our sins. Keep in mind that oil and wine were poured on the altar in the temple. Jesus pours himself - he is the true healing for all of us. And finally, the Samaritan pays the price for the dying man. In other words, he redeems him. Christ has redeemed us with his holy, innocent, precious blood. Luther goes on to say:

If we were to be delivered from this deplorable condition, from death and eternal damnation, it had to be done by the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the true Samaritan. He had to become man and take upon Himself our sins and diseases, and to assure us in His Word that by His sufferings and death He has rendered satisfaction for our sins, and by His resurrection has brought to light righteousness and eternal salvation.

At this point, Jesus then asked the expert in the law: “which of the three men was a neighbor to the man?” He answered, “The one who was kind to him.” In response, Jesus urged him to “go and do likewise.” In other words, if you want to understand what it means to love your neighbor, then look to Jesus who is THE Good Samaritan and then love as he loved you. You notice that all of this is a bomb that explodes any notion that we may have of earning our heaven by anything that we do. The Good Samaritan does it all. And we are only Good Samaritans [in the plural] because he was THE Good Samaritan to us. Once again Luther:

If we believe these truths with all our heart, we will be urged by the example of the Samaritan to love our neighbor. It is the nature of the Word, whenever it is rightly heard and believed, to make such people as the Samaritan here, who are full of pity and kindness toward every sufferer. When they find others in misery, they are ready to deliver them at their own trouble and expense. I have reference here to the help of indigent poor who are not in the habit of begging, like the indolent, idle and slothful professional beggars, who never can

be induced to labor, but wander about over the whole country. Such vagabonds should not be supported. But when a Christian meets a worthy poor person he will be ready to help, like the Samaritan. He will reason thus: "It is my neighbor, a man composed of body and soul like myself, and having the same God that I have. Hence he has also more claim on me than any other creature, and I will not pass him by. Come, dear brother, let me help you!" He has compassion on him, as the Samaritan had compassion on the man having fallen among thieves, or a mother on her sick and suffering child. These are the true saints.

Being a good Samaritan always has its source in the cross and THE Good Samaritan who by his wounds poured healing into our wounds. And when we extend ourselves to others in the same way, it is the ongoing work of Jesus. What we do for our neighbor is understood as Jesus visiting them.

May God then help us to see Jesus in the face of those who have been left for dead by thieves, and may we pray that those who have been left for dead will see Jesus in us! Who is my neighbor? That really shouldn't even be a question. Everyone we come into contact with on a daily basis should be understood as our neighbor. Jesus says: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matt 7:7)." And Paul writes: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves (Phil. 2:3)."

May it be So!

Pastor Brock Abbott