

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity | St. Luke 10:23-37
August 30, 2015 | Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church

In Nomine Iesu

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Grant to us, Lord, we beseech You, the spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may by You be enabled to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Trinity 8)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Then turning to the disciples [Jesus] said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." / And behold, a lawyer stood up to put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" / He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" / And he answered, "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." / And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." / But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" / Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' / "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" / He said, "The one who showed him mercy." / And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who by His grace fulfills what we are unable to do, dear fellow redeemed:

You may feel sometimes that you are not much good to your neighbor. You may feel this way because you are too shy to engage those around you with the love of Christ. Or you may be physically unable to do the things you used to, which makes you feel almost worthless. Or you may feel guilty because you know God has set opportunities before you to help others, but you were concerned only with your own plans like the priest and the Levite who ignored the wounded man.

Let us get three things established before we go any further. First of all, it is true for all of us that we have ignored opportunities to help others because of our own selfishness. By nature, we are concerned only about our own well-being and success. This is why God inspired the psalmist to write, *“The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one”* (Ps. 14:2-3). That is a very clear description of the sinful condition of every human being.

The next thing we need to be clear about is the definition of “neighbor.” We think of our neighbors as those who live near our homes. But God defines neighbor more broadly. A neighbor is anyone around us, anyone we come in contact with. Our neighbor is the person we pass in the supermarket aisle. Our neighbor is the friend who posts something on social media. Our neighbor is the person we call “Mom” or “Dad,” “husband” or “wife,” “son” or “daughter,” “co-worker” or “customer.” Except for moving into the wilderness alone, you cannot avoid your neighbors.

Finally, God, who is present in all places, considers every human being His neighbor. As a perfect neighbor, He clearly saw the need of sinful humanity and therefore sent His Son to visit the human race. He did not come asking for a cup of sugar, a misplaced tool, or anything like that. He asked for nothing at all, but instead gave everything including His own life for the sake of His neighbors. This salvation is obtained by all who trust in Him. The Apostle Paul made this abundantly clear in his letter to the Ephesians, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (2:8-9). But that does not mean good works have no place in the life of the believer in Christ. Paul continues, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (v. 10).

God urges us as His children to do good things. He wants us to express our love for Him by showing love to our neighbors. But the good works we do would not be possible without God. So while we **Keep Up the Good Work** toward those around us, we honor God as the source of all that is good – **God Keeps Up the Good Work** we do.

I

So God has set up good works for us to do in each of our lives. But how can I manage to do good when I struggle so much with sin? And how will I know what good works God has prepared in advance for me?

We understand well the struggle St. Paul talks about when he said, *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing”* (Rom. 7:18-19). “See!” we think, “It’s no use! Try as I might, I just keep doing evil instead of good!” But it is one thing to recognize our sins; it is another to give way to them. In other words, if I am convinced that it will not be possible for me to do good because of my sinful nature and the schemes of the devil, then very likely I will embrace that idea and stop trying to do good. This can be the state of those who struggle with addictions, like addictions to drugs, alcohol, pornography, junk food, or anything else.

But such a defeatist mentality ignores both the command and the promise of God. Jesus twice commanded the lawyer in today's text to follow the Commandments by showing love to Him and mercy to others. It is His will for the life of everybody, that they should love and sacrifice for others. God has also promised to produce these good works in the lives of believers. While it is true that *"nothing good dwells in me"* by nature, it is also true that the God of perfect goodness dwells in me by faith.

Time and time again in the New Testament, the holy writers speak about how the Triune God dwells in us by faith. God the Holy Spirit is identified most frequently in this regard. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit *"dwells with you and will be in you"* (Jn. 14:17). Paul asked the Corinthians, *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"* (1Cor. 3:16). Then Jesus also said about Himself, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing"* (Jn. 15:5).

This brings us back to the question: how will I know what good works God has prepared in advance for me? You might hear a lot of talk from Christians about *"searching out God's plan for my life."* They are looking for some great thing to do in the name of God, something that they can point to and say, *"Clearly this is what God wants for me."* But often these things are less about serving God and more about serving self. What these people fail to recognize is that the good works God has prepared for you, may not always make you feel good. You may have a hard time seeing the good in them; they may not be very self-fulfilling. They may be a lot more *"work"* than they seem *"good."*

Caring for an elderly parent who does not recognize you anymore or for a teething baby or sick child who wakes you up each hour of the night, may not seem all that good. Having someone throw your kind gesture back in your face may not feel great. How can any of these things be the *"good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"*? But they are good. They are works that God does through us out of love for all people. He has compassion on children and gives parents to care for them. Then when parents grow old, He gives them into the care of their children and other helpers. He sends Christians into the world to show His love and compassion by what they say and do for others.

II

The lawyer correctly summarized the Ten Commandments when he replied to Jesus, *"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."* It is true that *"love is the fulfilling of the law"* (Rom. 13:10). There is probably no better known description of love than the one in 1 Corinthians 13, *"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"* (vv. 4-7). But for how eloquent this is, it is just as discouraging. We have often reluctantly and half-heartedly done the works of love that God prepared for us and requires of us.

Take comfort in this: while God puts good works in front of you each day as you interact with your neighbors, your salvation in no way depends on how well you do. Hebrews 11:6 says that *"without faith it is impossible to please God."* This means conversely that *"with faith it is impossible not to please God."* It may be that you have often resembled the priest and the Levite more than

the Samaritan when you have seen others in need. Or you may have acted heroically and generously like the Samaritan, but then you wanted others to know about your good work and praise you instead of God.

But God is still pleased with you and forgives your sins. Jesus already lived the perfect life for you that God requires of you. He kept up the good work in every way, never ceasing to show love to His neighbor. He perfectly loved God and you. He *is* love. Listen again to those eloquent words from 1 Corinthians 13, but with one word replaced: “[Jesus] is *patient and kind*; [Jesus] does not envy or boast; [He] is not arrogant or rude. [He] does not insist on [His] own way; [He] is not irritable or resentful; [He] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [Jesus] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (vv. 4-7). Jesus lived this life of perfect love for you, so that by faith in Him you might abound in good works toward others with all freedom and gladness.

So then “let us not grow weary of doing good.... [A]s we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:9-10). God urges us to **Keep Up the Good Work** and promises to give us the will to do it, the strength to carry it out, and the grace to satisfy what is lacking. As we do our work, His work of forgiving and filling and fortifying us through the Word and Sacraments will not end. He will keep up this good work for us until our earthly work has ended and our eternal rest begins.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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