

In Nomine Iesu

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity 2022 Jesus, the Good Samaritan – Luke 10:23-37

“Then turning to the disciples he 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.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You go, and do likewise.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Good Samaritan. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

Labor Day weekend has come and gone. Election season is under way. Candidates are running to become senators and congressmen, governors and state legislators, mayors and town councilors. Thousands of political offices need to be filled. And thousands of politicians are running to fill them. We are again hearing promises from those out of office and explanations from those in office.

Since so much of what political office holders do has to do with law – making it, executing it, and interpreting it – it should come as no surprise that many of those running are lawyers. We could make some humorous observations at their expense at this point, but we aren’t here to demean what should be an honorable vocation. Instead let’s note something both helpful and true in understanding lawyers and the portion of God’s Word that is before us this day: Lawyers and politicians formulate positions and policies from a very narrow perspective. Why wouldn’t they? That is the way they are trained. You know the old saying, if your only tool is a hammer every problem is a nail. But, dear friends, we too think narrowly. We too can be like lawyers and politicians when confronted with God’s word. For we, like the lawyer, tend to ask, “What do I need to do to please God?” And so, we often fail to see and hear the truth; and we do not give the right answer.

I

Jesus dealt with the lawyer’s question as He so often did when questions were put to Him: He answered as you might answer your son or daughter’s question ... with

a question. He asked, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” The lawyer was no fool – lawyers seldom are. He summarized the moral law using Moses’ own words: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18) Jesus could only respond, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” And there’s the problem!

Who can do what the Law requires? Who can love God with the totality of your heart, soul, and strength? Who can love God 100% of the time? Remember, God is not our husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, any of whom would be well-pleased if the percentage of our words and works toward them were good and right more than the degrees of room temperature in our house on a warm day in Washington. But God is perfect. To be in His presence requires perfection. For that reason His Law accuses, judges and condemns us all, the 50%’ers and the 90%’ers, as well as those we might like to think of as “really bad.” Why? Because we are all lawyers and politicians when it comes to ourselves. We make promises like those who desire to fill this or that office and we explain and excuse our words and deeds like those who do hold office.

Look at the lawyer in our text. He did what lawyers do. He looked for a loophole. He looked to impose a “statute of limitation” on the commandments of God. He is like us: “How far can I go before it becomes adultery, murder, theft, or lying?” We look for a way to qualify the law, to make the law doable for us. And so, the lawyer did what we’ve all done, he latched on to the word neighbor. He wanted a definition, a legal definition, what do you mean when you say, “neighbor”? “Who is my neighbor?”

So, Jesus told a story. A man traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho - not very far - and downhill all the way. Along the way he was beaten and robbed, and left to die, just as you hear all the time in the news. The story goes on. First a priest, then a Levite, experts in the Law of God, church professionals, came along, looked at the injured man, and passed by. They may have had good reasons for passing by, just as we often have reasons for not doing what we should or doing what we shouldn’t when we see someone who may need help. “Situation Ethics,” the title of a best-selling book by Joseph Fletcher, published in 1966, was the talk of U.S. college campuses. It was a best-seller, because as controversial as it was, it found a ready and willing readership. Its thinking – always well hidden in the human heart - gave respectability to the priest, Levite, and lawyer in us all. It is the dominant view of our society today. It is why our society seems to be falling apart.

The story continues: a Samaritan came down the road and saw the victim. He “had compassion” on the man. He did what the moment required. He went to him immediately; poured oil and wine on the man’s wounds, wrapped him with bandages, and took him to an inn. As if that were not enough, he left money with the owner to pay for expenses with the promise of more if needed. The Samaritan did for the wounded man what God’s Law demands. He did not waste time arguing whether he was obligated to take care of this fellow, this neighbor. He just did what was good and right. He did the will of His Father in heaven.

II

Jesus then turned to the lawyer with a final question: “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” The answer, of course, was self-evident and inescapable: “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

The lawyer had asked Jesus a law question, “What must **I do** to inherit eternal life?” A law question. Law questions require law answers just as hammers require nails. What is always true is this: If you ask the wrong question, you will never get the right answer. Jesus’ last question was not a Law question. He had already led the lawyer down the path of the Law until every escape was blocked. Who was his neighbor? Everyone in need. No more loopholes. No one can justify himself before God. Everyone who hears Jesus’ story must recognize that when confronted with the demands of God’s Law he or she is as guilty as the priest or Levite **and** as helpless and in need of a good neighbor as the man robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the Jericho road. We self-trained lawyers need to see that Jesus is the Good Samaritan who does what needs to be done for us – even dying in our place on the cross. He is the One who comes to us, sees us stripped of all excuses before the Law’s accusations, and dying as a result. He picks us up and binds up our wounds with His comforting word of forgiveness. He carries us to the refuge of His forgiving mercy given to us in word and sacrament. Jesus is **the Good Samaritan**. That is the only right answer to the question Jesus asks.

Later in His ministry, equally clever and self-justifying experts in the law asked Jesus, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Remember His answer? “I do not have a demon.” (John 8:48) He denied having a demon, but He didn’t deny being a Samaritan. He couldn’t. He is **THE** Good Samaritan.

Now, you may say, “Wait a minute. That is a stretch.” Ah, but it isn’t at all. Yes indeed, Luke recorded the story in front of us this morning, and John many years later took note of Jesus’ answer to the accusation of His having a demon and being a Samaritan. Luke surely did record the story, as we read, but John was there! John saw and heard the story Jesus told. He himself observed the reaction of the lawyer to the question, “Which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” Or do you think those scribes and lawyers who later argued with Jesus, colleagues and acquaintances of the lawyer in our text, knew nothing of his losing exchange with Jesus? You can be sure they recalled and resented Jesus.

The Son of God became man to save dying humanity. He did not shun us in our sin, as the Law must, as it renders rightful judgment on our sins. But He, like the Samaritan, lifted us onto His own shoulders, placed us gently on the donkey He Himself rode into the holy city of Jerusalem, and there left us in a place of safety to watch as He gave His own body into death and judgment. By His atoning death our Good Samaritan gives us forgiveness and life. Such an inheritance **cannot be earned**, not even by being a good neighbor. It is an inheritance, a gift we are given in Jesus Christ, **the Good Samaritan**.

The life Christians live, we live in Him. We can love our neighbor only because we have first been loved by Jesus, **the Good Samaritan**. As the Apostle John said: “In

this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:10-11)

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Faith sees in Jesus the love that God has for us. It sees in Him a gift. And there is only one thing to do with a gift - receive it with thanks. Faith lays hold of what our Lord gives us as He washes away our sin in Holy Baptism, as He declares us freed from guilt in His Absolution, and as He nourishes us with His body and blood to strengthen us with forgiveness, life, and salvation. Such faith then turns to others and gives as it has received. But please note well that such love does not make us Christians. It only shows us to be Christians. It flows from faith in Him, who alone is our Redeemer, our Good Samaritan. Remember how our text began, Jesus said to His disciples, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see.” Blessed are the eyes of all who, when the Law asks, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?”, fall before Jesus and say, “You are, Lord. You are the Good Samaritan. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria