

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
5 & 6 September, Anno Domini 2020
St. Luke 10:23-37
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

No. You are not the Samaritan. Jesus is answering the question of how a person inherits eternal life, not how to act toward my neighbor. But don't be surprised if your first impulse was to think "So, if I want to inherit eternal life, I need to take care of my neighbor – I need to be the Good Samaritan." That is always what your Old Adam wants you to believe. He wants you to think that you're justified, that you are acceptable to God, because you have tried hard to be better and treat others with the same mercy as the Good Samaritan. And then, conveniently, your Old Adam's best friend, the devil, comes at you from the other side to remind you that you didn't love your neighbor as yourself and you didn't always show him mercy. It's a pretty slick system that is designed to leave you feeling hopeless. It is designed to strip you, beat you, and leave you lying half dead in a ditch on the side of the road.

No. If you believe that you are the Good Samaritan, then you are the lawyer, seeking to justify himself, to win salvation by what you have done. Repent and see what kings and prophets longed to see – the better way, the good way, THE WAY. See your salvation. See Jesus. You will never find certainty of your salvation or comfort going down the road of "What must I do to inherit eternal life." There are robbers on that road, waiting for you. Failure. Guilt. Eternal judgment. This is what Jesus was teaching the lawyer. Rather than bristling and being angry with the lawyer, Jesus took pity on Him because He saw just how delusional he was and how misled he had been. But if Jesus was going to help Him, He first had to pull back the curtain on the lie the lawyer had fallen prey to.

The Law which the lawyer correctly repeated to Jesus will always demand more than you are able to give, the devil knows this and banks on it. The Law is not your neighbor. As you struggle against the knowledge of your own failures and shortcomings, as you daily wrestle with the desires of your flesh, against Satan's relentless attempts to plant the seeds of doubt and despair in your mind that God could love someone who has done the things that you have done, the last place you will find any rest is back in yourself. Trying harder won't get you anywhere or bring you any peace – just the opposite. God's demand of perfection can only pass by on the other side of the road, reminding you again and again that you are

unclean – that you have not kept the First Commandment, that you haven't feared loved and trusted in God above all other things. The world and your own reasoning, who tell you to just try harder, pray harder, love more and trust more deeply are liars who do not want you to know the peace that God gives you. That is why the sinful world will always assume that they are the good Samaritan. They think they are justified by what they do.

It's not that the Law is wrong. The priest and the Levite were obeying the letter of the Law. If they had gone and helped their fellow Jew lying there in the ditch, they would have made themselves unclean and unable to fulfill their duties in the temple. They were obeying the Law. That what the Law does. It demands obedience, perfect obedience of you. But that doesn't help you as it didn't help the man in the ditch. St. Paul said as much in last week's Epistle – the letter kills. It kills by its accusation leaving you in the ditch offering you no help, no way out.

But someone else has passed down the road and seen you lying in the ditch, beaten and bruised by sin and guilt and He had compassion on you. Before the foundations of the world were laid, God saw what would become of you and it broke His heart. He knew that you could never save yourself, that if He left you to work your way to heaven, you would never find your way there. So in his great mercy He came in the person of His Son to bind up your wounds and provide you with the care you needed. Jesus has truly fulfilled the Law – He loved you even though it meant He would be made unclean. He has climbed down into the ditch of your sin. He knelt down beside you in the mud and filth of your broken family, your ever-mounting debt, and dwindling paycheck, your addictions, your anxiousness, your weariness and your heart heavy with guilt. None of it was enough to turn Him away. He never says, "I can't help you. Your problems are too much for me." His mercy is so deep that He didn't even wait for you to ask for His help. He just helped you because He knew you weren't even capable of asking for help.

A phrase that has no place in the mouth or heart of a Christian is "God helps those who help themselves." That is not mercy. That is not a God that you need. God's compassion drove Him to spare nothing to save. Whatever it would cost Him, He was willing to pay. He has poured the cleansing oil and wine of forgiveness on your wounds, killing the infection of sin that threatened to kill you eternally. He has picked you up in His tender, gentle arms by being made a man, like you, taking your sinful flesh and making it His own. He then stretched out those same arms on the cross, exposing Himself to the full wrath of God against your sin, so that you would be spared. Whatever the Law is trying to accuse you of has already been

paid for. You are free of all your guilt because Jesus said “I will be guilty for you. I will pay the price for your sin – everything you owe, I will pay with my blood.”

And Jesus has brought you to this inn, the Church, where He provides for your continued care, telling you again and again as you struggle in this world that you are His beloved child and that you have nothing, absolutely nothing, to fear. He has gone after the robbers who left you for dead and brought them to justice. They are defeated. He has washed all your wounds clean with the pure life-giving waters of Holy Baptism. And now He says to you “Come. Take and eat, not just bread and wine, but my body and blood which were shed for you, yes you. They will heal you. They will give you peace. There is no better medicine than the Lord’s Supper. And in return I ask nothing. You do not need to pay it forward. You owe me nothing. I give it to you because I love you and I want you to live.”

And this is far more than an inn. This is your father’s house. You are still a sojourner in this world, but here, as you are gathered together to hear the life-giving voice of your Savior with your Christian family, you are caught up into heaven, into the worship of the angels, the archangels, the apostles, and prophets, and all the saints who have departed this life and now rest eternally in Christ’s presence awaiting your arrival. In the Divine Service you join the liturgy of heaven pictured for us in the book of Revelation, singing the hymns of the angels, gathering around God’s throne, praising Him for His great goodness and mercy. Here you bask in the presence of the Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ, who proved to be your truest neighbor by having compassion on you and being Himself the mercy of the Father for you by His obedience and atoning death.

And NOW, now that you have been shown mercy, you are free to go and do likewise with the same joy and reckless abandon as Jesus, because you don’t have to justify yourself before God. You don’t need to convince either yourself or God that you are a good Samaritan. He has already taken care of that for you. You are justified. God couldn’t be more pleased with you. The kingdom of heaven is yours RIGHT NOW because you are forgiven. All that is God’s, He shares with you freely because you are His dear child and He is your dear Father who is in heaven. There is nothing you need that He won’t provide and hasn’t provided already. Praise be to God because He has loved you with an everlasting love and showered His eternal mercies on you again this day.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.