

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 10:23-37

30 August, Anno Domini 2026

Children of God,

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The lawyer, who was by training supposed to be an expert in the Mosaic law, thought he had a brilliant question that would bring all of Jesus' talk about God being merciful and forgiving sinners crashing down and reestablish the true teaching that salvation is for the Jews alone through the keeping of God's Law. He had had enough of Jesus insulting wise and learned men like himself as Jesus had just done when He praised the Father for hiding the things of salvation from the wise and understanding and instead revealing them to little children. How dare Jesus insinuate that men like the lawyer and the scribes and the Pharisees and the priests didn't know the things of God! He would show Jesus. He would outwit Jesus and lead Him into speaking something false. He thought he could play games with Jesus. But Jesus doesn't play games. Jesus only deals in eternal life and death and as the lawyer came to experience in his own conscience, before there can be life there must be death.

When the lawyer posed his question to Jesus "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", he thought he had just checkmated Jesus. What is the law for if not to merit eternal life? Instead, he quickly found himself trapped. The very law he trusted in to save him was crushing his soul. He knew the law. His summary was certainly correct. But knowing the law is not the same as keeping the law. When Jesus said "Do this and you will live", the lawyer suddenly found himself filled with the terror of God's wrath. Whereas before he had taken great pride and solace in his intellectual knowledge of the law, now, when the the command to actually carry out the law in all its fullness was demanded of him, his self-righteousness was obliterated. The words "Do this" were like a javelin that struck him right through heart. The impregnable fortress of his own works was revealed as nothing more than an illusion.

There was most certainly a way out and he should have known it through his study of the Scriptures but the smug lawyer showed no sign of recognizing it because of the hardness of his heart that wanted nothing more than pride and status among

men. Instead, the lawyer made a desperate attempt to prove that he had kept something of the law, that he actually had done something worthy of eternal life. Suddenly, his interaction with Jesus was no longer about testing Jesus, it was about freeing himself from the certain eternal damnation that was hanging over him.

But foolishly, sadly, he still believed that the law could save him. It just needed to be made more attainable. There was no way for him to limit the command to love God which is defined by the First Table of the Law. Now, perhaps the lawyer was deluded enough, as our sinful flesh always is, to imagine that he had actually kept the first three commandments, that he could or already did DO that part of the law. He certainly studied the Scriptures (though he clearly neither understood them nor believed them). No doubt he fasted and prayed and tithed and kept the traditions of the rabbis. That part is easy, right? How often do we find ourselves having the same self-righteous thoughts, believing that we will inherit eternal life BECAUSE we go to church and put something in the offering plate and read the Bible and don't worship Allah or Buddha? Or perhaps the lawyer knew there was no way he could possibly keep the first table and so he bolted over to the second table thinking he could find some comfort there. You know, "I haven't murdered anyone. I've never cheated on my wife. I've never robbed a bank. I'm not as bad as drug dealers or terrorists or those people who aren't as Lutheran as I am. So therefore I am a good person and that will earn me eternal life."

Either way, he betrayed the true condition of his heart. He neither knew nor loved the true God because he neither knew nor desired God's mercy. By asking the question "And who is my neighbor?", the lawyer was asking Jesus to tell him that there are people he didn't have to love like tax collectors and sinners and prostitutes and Samaritans. If he could somehow limit the law, then surely he had a chance at keeping it.

But the law will not be hemmed in. It's demands are clear, absolute, and unyielding. You have either kept the law or you haven't. Nor can you break the law in one place and still imagine that you have kept it sufficiently in another. If you break one part of the law, you have sinned against the one Triune God who stands behind all of it. The apostle James writes "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For He who said 'Do not commit adultery,' also said 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." (James 2:10-11) If you don't show mercy to whoever it is who needs it, then you neither know nor love God and your lovelessness will condemn you. James then goes on to say "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13)

Consider the example set before us from 2 Chronicles 28. It was God who had given the men of Judah into Israel's hands. They certainly deserved God's full rage poured out to them through the Israelites. King Ahaz of Judah was a wicked king who had brought back Baal worship and even committed the abomination of offering his son as a sacrifice. And yet, we hear from the prophet Oded that God's wrath was against the very Israelites whom God had sent to punish Judah! Why? Because the Israelites had shown no mercy to their brothers and were even planning to enslave them. It didn't matter before God that Judah deserved it. The Israelites, mindful of their own sins and their need from mercy from God, should have shown mercy to their brothers.

Mercy doesn't come with conditions. It's mercy or it's not. The Good Samaritan laid no conditions on the man in the ditch. It didn't matter that he was a Jew. It didn't matter if he had been foolish in traveling to Jericho. It didn't matter if he was suffering the just consequences of terrible decisions. All that mattered was that he needed mercy or he was going to die. And the Samaritan poured it out to him in abundance. He bore the whole responsibility and cost of his recovery. Even after getting him to safety, at which point he could have wished him well and simply went his own way, he made the incredible promise that he would return and pay all other expenses that had been incurred!

Jesus loved the lawyer even though the lawyer hated Jesus. That is why Jesus let the full force of the law come crashing down on the lawyer and when he tried to wiggle out from underneath it, told him the parable. Jesus was working to bring the lawyer to recognize his own death and inability to save himself by the law so that he would hunger for and receive God's mercy. The one way that the lawyer could have been saved from the death which his failure to keep the law, his sin, had inflicted upon him and from which that same law could never save him, was the very person standing before him and whom he was arrogantly trying to outwit and prove wrong. He couldn't and didn't want to see what the apostles saw, what Isaiah and Jeremiah, David and Solomon and the other faithful prophets and kings longed to see and hear - the God of Father Abraham who was also the offspring of Abraham and the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham which came 430 years after the promise. His self-righteousness blinded him to his own death and inability to save himself. This Samaritan, this outsider, Jesus of Nazareth, had come down from heaven to do what the lawyer and we cannot do because of the sin that has so thoroughly corrupted us. He alone loved the Lord our God with all His heart, soul, strength, and mind. And then, having been tempted in every way as we are yet never sinning, the Lord Jesus Christ loved us perfectly as Himself by innocently

suffering the full punishment of the law's condemnation of OUR sin. As the prophet Isaiah foretold in the Holy Spirit "But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with His wounds we are healed." (Is. 53:5)

Mercy and forgiveness - these alone are the way of life. Because sin has left us dead, without any righteousness of our own, we need another righteousness, an alien righteousness. We need a righteousness that is given to us freely as a gift, without any merit or worthiness on our part. The law can't ever give us that. The law, if we will listen to it in humility, is only the way in which we can recognize that we are dead. It's not the law that robbed us and beat us. Our sin did that. The law only makes clear that we deserve to be dead in the ditch.

The law shows me that if I refuse to love my neighbor by showing him mercy and instead in my heart continue to hold his sins against him, treating him as an outsider and enemy who remains a threat to me, I am confessing something much darker that should terrify me - I do not love God and I have refused His mercy toward me. Can I at the same time cry out "Lord, have mercy upon me!" and then refuse the same mercy to my neighbor? Can the same lips that open to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus that were sacrificed to seal the new testament by which God promises to accept Jesus' death as the sufficient substitute for mine then shut in silence toward my brother who has hurt me by the way he has lived? And it will not suffice to forgive your brother only with your lips. Our Lord explicitly says His heavenly Father will throw us into the prison of hell until we have made fully satisfaction for our sins "if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." (Mtt. 18:35) When God forgives you, He forgives you truly and completely from His heart.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, be merciful even as your heavenly Father has been merciful toward you. Let the holy Law of God sound forth and expose all the sin and corruption of your heart so that you can rightly despair of your own righteousness and goodness. The more honestly and fully you receive the law's just judgment, the more wonderful and beautiful and freeing is the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ who willingly left His throne in heaven for the very purpose of entering the ditch of our death. He understood perfectly what our sin had done to us. That is why He willingly left His heavenly Jerusalem because we had left it to travel the broad road that leads to cursed Jericho and it grieved Him. It didn't matter that we absolutely deserved every evil that befell us. It didn't even matter that we would resist His merciful work. He is the God of mercy and love. He was filled with compassion and did absolutely everything necessary for our salvation. He picked us up

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and poured the cleansing water of Holy Baptism upon us. He brought us to the inn of His mercy, the Holy Christian Church, where His healing mercy daily and richly forgives all your sins and the sins of all believers in Christ. Here, the innkeeper, your pastor, applies the balm of Holy Absolution and nourishes you with the food of the Lord's Supper which Christ prepared on the cross for us Christians to eat and to drink. Here and as you hear the Scriptures in your own home, the Lord covers you again in His righteousness.

Dear children, it has been the Father's good will to reveal these things to you through His Son Jesus Christ so that with the kings and prophets, with the apostles and martyrs you may rightly see Jesus as the mercy of God who has lifted you up out of death and through whom you have received the promised inheritance of eternal life. May you be so filled with the rich mercy of Christ that you fear neither death nor hell and live as an eternal fountain of mercy and love and forgiveness to all around you who stand in need of that same mercy.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.