

09-06-20

13th Sunday after Trinity
Christ our Good Samaritan

Luke 10: 23-37

23) Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; **24)** for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.” **25)** And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” **26)** He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” **27)** So he answered and said, “‘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.’” **28)** And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” **29)** But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” **30)** Then Jesus answered and said, “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. **31)** Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. **32)** Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. **33)** But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. **34)** So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. **35)** On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you. **36)** So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?’” **37)** And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The episode which Luke describes in our text took place not long after our Lord had sent out seventy of His followers in pairs to preach the Gospel in all the cities and towns which He Himself would soon visit. Those seventy had just returned, and they had reported to Jesus the great success of their work. Even the demons, they told Him, had been subject to them. Our Lord, the evangelist tells us, “rejoiced in the Spirit” at hearing how His Gospel had been so well-received, and in gratitude He prayed, “I thank You,

Father, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for it seemed good in Your sight.” Now, Luke writes, there comes to Jesus a lawyer—a scholar of the Scriptures and an expert in the Law of Moses. Whereas Jesus’ disciples had shown themselves to be among the “babes” of whom Jesus speaks because they accepted in simple faith what was revealed to them, this man shows that he belongs to that group which our Savior calls the supposedly “wise and prudent”—people from whom in reality, because of their own arrogance and prideful unbelief, the mysteries of the Kingdom remain completely hidden.

This expert in the Law, we should note, is completely disingenuous when he speaks to Jesus. Like so many of the scribes and Pharisees, he has not really come to listen and to learn at all. His purpose, Luke says, is to “test” the Prophet from Nazareth—to catch Jesus in some error if he can and to display before all the people what he thinks is his own superior knowledge of the Law.

We should also see that, in His answer, our Savior speaks out of His deep and saving love even for this lawyer who has come to test Him. Jesus wants this man to understand the Scriptures in a new and entirely different way. He wants this man to see that what is demanded of him by the Law is so much more than he could ever do. And our Savior also wants this man to find in Him—Mary’s Son who is God’s Son—the Rescuer and Helper he needs for his soul.

I

Luke shows us, first of all, that Jesus and this lawyer have two entirely different ways of understanding the Old Testament Scriptures. On the first Easter Day, as He walked with two of His disciples to the town of Emmaus, our Savior explained to them that Moses and the Psalms and the prophets all testify of Him—the Lord’s Anointed. The moral Law of God shows our need for Him. The ceremonies and sacrifices commanded by Moses pointed to the sacrifice He would offer for our sin. The Psalms are His thoughts. The books of the prophets speak of Him and His saving work in such detail and with such precision because their true Author is the Holy Spirit.

This lawyer, on the other hand, thinks of the Scriptures as a book of rules which he must obey, and which he has generally followed very well. “Teacher,” the man asks, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He hopes to catch Jesus in the mistake of valuing one of the commandments over the others. In His answer, Jesus points the man to the heart of the Law—its demand that we love God with all our inner being and that we love our neighbors as ourselves. “Do this and you shall live,” our Lord tells him.

The man has failed in his attempt to trap Jesus, and so—in order to “justify himself” and to save face—he asks, “And who is my neighbor?” as if it were only that puzzling little detail which kept him from keeping the Law perfectly. In response, our Lord tells this parable in our text.

The man’s question to Jesus has implied that only some are our neighbors while others are not, that we must act in love toward some but not necessarily toward others, that we have obligations to help some but not to help everyone. Therefore in His parable Jesus illustrates that very principle in the actions of the priest and the Levite. Although they should be the model of keeping the law of love, they pass by the wounded man—deciding, apparently, that he is not their neighbor at all. Their shameful callousness toward the wounded man—that, we need to understand, is what our holy Lord sees in us when we do not act for the good of all those around us.

In Jesus’ story, it is the Samaritan who does not pass by. This, too, was a call to this lawyer to examine himself. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews as racially and religiously impure. Yet in Jesus’ story it is the Samaritan who shows the kind of active and helping love which the Law demands, as even the lawyer must admit. “Go and do likewise,” Jesus says.

II

In a sermon on this text, Martin Luther preached to the congregation in Wittenberg that Christ Jesus Himself is our Good Samaritan. That profound insight is really the key for us to understand fully and to profit from His parable and for us to want to follow the command He gives also to us to “go and do likewise.” The expert in the Law in our text and also the proud Pharisee in us wants to know what we must do—what Law we must fulfill—in order to earn our Lord’s approval. But with His parable Jesus answers this man and us, “You cannot keep the Law of God as it demands. You can-not and do not love God with all your heart and soul and mind. You cannot and do not love your neighbor as you should. You have been robbed by the devil and by your own sin of the image of God with which you were created. You have been beaten and wounded in your soul and left to die. You need someone to rescue you, cleanse you, nourish you, and care for you.”

It is Christ Jesus, our Good Samaritan, who has found us as we lay helpless and dying. It is our Good Samaritan who has washed our wounds in the healing waters of baptism and has dressed them with the oil and wine of His mercy and His blood-bought pardon. He has taken us to the inn of His Church—here in this sanctuary and wherever His Word is preached. He has provided for the ongoing nourishment of our souls with His Gospel and His sacramental meal—to feed our faith in Him, to strengthen our trust in His

forgiveness and love.

And like the Samaritan in His story, Jesus has paid in full for our recovery and our care. The cost of healing us was His own life, and there on the cross of Golgotha our Good Samaritan cried out as He died, “It is finished!” The medicine which all of us need for our souls—His pardon and His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, new life with Him now and the sure hope of eternal life with Him in heaven—He has purchased all of it. All is paid in full. “It is finished!” That is the perfect love that our Good Samaritan has shown to us. And now He says to us, “Go and do likewise! (Go and show to others the kind of caring and helping love that I have shown to you!)”

III

“Go and do likewise,” Jesus says to us. It may not happen that we pass a robbed and wounded person lying by the road. But we can seek to follow our Savior’s command in less dramatic but nevertheless very real ways in the daily callings into which our Lord has placed us. As parents, as husbands and wives, as sisters and brothers, as friends and co-workers, we have an opportunity to show Jesus’ kind of caring love to others. We have the opportunity to think about what wine and oil they require for their hurts—what word of encouragement they need to hear, what act of compassion and kindness would brighten their lives, what kind of help they must have. As Luther noted, our Lord’s people are being the kind of neighbor that Jesus describes here when children honor their parents, and parents work to be the best fathers and mothers they can be, and when workers give their best efforts for their employers, and when officials honorably fulfill their duties to the people they serve.

Also our communities need for Christ’s people to “go and do likewise”—to follow the example set for us by our Savior—by volunteering at schools, hospitals, foodbanks, and wherever we can help. Today when people can seem so divided from and so uncaring toward each other, Christ’s people need and want more than ever to follow His example and thus to show what kind of a Savior we have. Our Good Samaritan has given His life for us on the cross, has smashed the power of death over us, and has made us whole and alive again who once lay broken and bleeding by the wayside. Now He calls us to follow His example—prayerfully and with His help. He has indeed set the standard high for us. But He promises to be with us and to strengthen us, and with His command He calls us to live already here the life of heaven where only “Good Samaritans” are found.

May the Holy Spirit grant that to us, for Jesus’ sake. Amen