

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 10:23-37: "Give Your Neighbor Jesus."
September 10, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O Lord Jesus Christ, our Good Samaritan and only Mediator, who, seeing us in our guilt and blood, had pity upon us and of Your infinite mercy gave Your innocent blood in payment for our sins that we might live, ...we humbly ask You, enable us by Your Holy Spirit to love You, the true God, with our whole heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves, that we may show mercy on all men in their need, bind up their wounds with tender care, and ever in this evil world follow Your example of love and service, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 156)

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 "loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2), dear fellow redeemed:

Seeing the destruction caused by recent wildfires and hurricanes in our country is heart-breaking. But in the midst of these great difficulties, it is heart-warming to hear stories of neighbors helping neighbors. There are people who spend their days assisting in clean-up

efforts in their communities, even though they themselves have lost their homes and possessions. Many others have donated toward relief efforts, with contributions for relief in Texas likely to reach hundreds of millions of dollars. At times like these, reference is often made to “the natural goodness in people.” Others comment that their “faith in humanity” has been restored. In a society sharply divided by political and religious differences, these moments of charity and kindness among neighbors are worth celebrating.

But it is not the good in a person that causes them to do these things. It is God. He is behind all the assistance and charity and love. It is no stretch to say that if God did not put His moral law in every human heart, no trouble, hardship, or pain experienced by my neighbor would cause me to lift a finger to help him. But because God has given this inner law, my conscience tells me that it is not okay to ignore a neighbor in need. It is my moral obligation to help as far as I am able.

If you had to sum up God’s Commandments in one word, that word would be “love.” This is just what Scripture says. It says that “[L]ove is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). In the first three Commandments, God tells us to love Him, since He is our Creator and Savior. The last seven Commandments are about how His love should be shared with others: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (v. 9).

I

But who is my neighbor? This is what a lawyer asked Jesus. It is an honest question, and yet the lawyer had ulterior motives. He asked the question, we are told, out of a desire “*to justify himself.*” He already thought he had fulfilled God’s requirement of love. Jesus answered him with an illustration. He described a man traveling on the road to Jericho (a journey which thankfully is not so treacherous around here). The man was attacked by robbers and left to die.

Along came a priest, one of his countrymen. Surely this “holy man” would help! But turning his eyes away from the dying man, he continued on his way. Another temple worker, a Levite, did the same thing. They acted like he wasn’t even there. Their plans were too important. They would not be delayed. No doubt someone else more qualified than they would come by soon. Perhaps they even calmed their consciences by saying that at least they would pray for this man. So it isn’t as though they did nothing....

There are many reasons we can come up with why we shouldn’t help a neighbor in need. We might tell ourselves that we are in no position to help. Others can provide much better assistance. Besides, I don’t want my neighbor to get comfortable with handouts. He should learn to work harder and help himself. And where was he when I needed help? What goes around comes around....

As logical as these reasons may seem, they are wrong. If I will not show love to my neighbor until it is most convenient, or until he has shown himself worthy of my love, then I probably won’t end up helping him at all. But God commands love for neighbor without any qualifications. Your neighbor, He says, is anyone around you, anyone whose life intersects in some way with yours. Your neighbor is the child who misbehaves and talks back to you. Your neighbor is the boss who unfairly criticizes you. Your neighbor is the teacher who blames you for something your classmate did. Your neighbor is the community member who doesn’t care

how his plans affect yours. Jesus tells us to love *all* our neighbors, even the ones who treat us badly.

But how is that even possible? How can God expect you to “*love your enemies*” (Mt. 5:44)? A lot depends on the perspective you have toward another. If you imagine that their primary goal in life is to make you feel miserable, and that they are constantly plotting to harm you, it is going to be difficult to have kind thoughts about them. Then your mind will be occupied with revenge, how you might return evil for evil.

But what if the disagreement between two neighbors started with a misunderstanding that could easily be cleared up? What if your neighbor thought you were attacking her before she ever attacked you? And could it be that the unkind words your neighbor directed toward you, were actually the result of other troubles going on in his life? This could help you look at your neighbor not as an enemy, but as someone who needs compassion.

Or maybe it's true - maybe your neighbor does hate you. This was likely the situation between the man on the road from Jerusalem and the Samaritan who helped him. The Jews and the Samaritans despised each other. The Jews accused the Samaritans of being godless, and the Samaritans accused the Jews of being self-righteous. So how is it that the Samaritan decided to help the man by the side of the road? Well he certainly could not control how the dying man thought about him, but he could control how he thought about the dying man. He decided to be merciful.

This is a picture of Jesus. He found us beaten up by sin, stripped of any righteousness, dying the death we deserved. We were His enemies. We broke His law. But He didn't wait for us to be worthy of His love. He freely gave it. He had compassion on us. He bound up our sin wounds by taking those stripes on Himself. He brought us spiritual health through His Word and Sacraments, and continues to strengthen us by those same means. He loved even the most undeserving of neighbors, which is what He calls you and me to do as well.

II

But loving and helping your neighbors does not mean giving them whatever they want. If they want you to join them in promoting or defending sinful behavior, it would be wrong for you to do this. Or if they ask you to give them one of your treasured possessions, or even your home, you do not have to do this. The Lord tells you to be generous and to share, but He does not command you to give away everything you have. Your neighbor is in no way entitled to your property, your possessions, your spouse or children. In fact, God commands us to help our neighbor *keep* these things.

What you are obligated to do for your neighbor is to help him have what he needs, more than what he wants. And the greatest need your neighbor has is Jesus. You can desire nothing better for your neighbor than that he repents of his sins and believes in Jesus alone as his Savior. This is our greatest treasure. It is our life and comfort and hope. With Jesus, you can stand to lose all of your earthly possessions, because they are only temporary. In Him, you are assured of the riches of heaven, which will never pass away.

But how can you **Give Your Neighbor Jesus**? There are two main ways, and neither of them works well without the other. The first way to give your neighbors Jesus is to be kind and merciful toward them. Take an interest in their lives. Listen to their problems. Lift them up when they are down. Offer a helping hand. Encourage them. Cheer for them. Call them up or stop by to let them know you are thinking about them. In these ways, you will gain your neighbor's trust and respect, and you will probably find a friend to help you in your difficulties. When you show love in these ways, you are really sharing God's love. He is the one working through you. John writes that *"if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us"* (1Jn. 4:12).

But if your concern for your neighbor goes no further than assisting with physical and emotional needs, you have failed to give the thing that is most needed. Above all else, your neighbor needs to hear the Gospel. This is the second major way to give your neighbor Jesus. Your neighbor needs to know that a loving God watches over her and that He has sent His only Son to redeem her, so that she may live eternally in heaven. All people are dying just like the man by the side of the road. All of them need the salvation and healing that come only through Jesus.

And just as love for your neighbor falls short if you do not take the opportunity to share the Gospel, it also fails if the Gospel message is not accompanied by kind and loving actions. For example, you may have had the experience of a complete stranger approaching you in a store or the mall to ask if you know Jesus as your personal Savior. It is as though the message-bringer is just trying to fulfill a quota. He doesn't spend the time to get to know you or find out how he can assist you. He just throws the Gospel in your face and hopes it sticks. That approach is rarely if ever effective in bringing about conversion. It turns people off to Christianity.

But when your neighbor has come to know your dedication and care for him, and sees the sacrifices you have made to serve him, he will be much more likely to listen when you share the message of Jesus. This is the outcome Jesus speaks about when He says, *"let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (Mt. 5:16).

This light of love does not always shine brightly in your life. You remember many times that you ignored a neighbor in need. But Jesus does not pass you by, bruised and battered by a guilty conscience. He forgives you for the times that sin and selfishness overcame you. He gives you, His neighbor, exactly what you need, which is His perfect love and His perfect righteousness. With these things as your possession and your motivation, your neighbor will not fail to receive through you good things from God.

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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