

Trinity 13 – Vicar Lehne Sermon
Luke 10:23–37: “Who Is My Neighbor?”
9/2/23; 9/3/23 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O God, our heavenly Father, you have given us the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have all too often failed to keep this command, but thanks to the perfect life and innocent death of your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the price for our sins has been fully paid for. So, for the sake of your Son, please forgive us for failing to love our neighbors, and help us to show love to them going forward. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

²⁹ But [the lawyer], desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ 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. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. . . . ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who always loves us, his neighbors, as himself, dear fellow redeemed:

The lawyer was not happy. After all, he was an expert in the Law. He knew what the Law said and what it meant. And yet, in a verse that came just before our text for today, Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” (Luke 10:21). Not only did this suggest that little children knew more about the Law than the lawyer did, but this also suggested that faith, given by God, was all that was required to understand the Holy Scriptures and to be saved. The lawyer had to prove that he understood the Law better than little children, better than Jesus. So, he put Jesus to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life” (verse 25)?

The Law clearly stated what a person had to do to be saved, so if Jesus' answer showed that he did, in fact, believe that it was by faith that a person was saved, he would prove his ignorance. However, Jesus didn't answer the lawyer's question. Instead, Jesus turned it on him, saying, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it” (verse 26)? While not what the lawyer was expecting, he now had a chance to prove that he understood the Law. So, he summarized the Law by saying, “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”

(verse 27). Jesus then responded to the lawyer by saying, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live” (verse 28).

Wait, so Jesus didn’t think that a person was saved by faith alone? That’s what Jesus’ response sounded like to the lawyer. However, that’s not what Jesus meant. He was actually trying to get the lawyer to see that he couldn’t live up to what the Law demanded and that it was purely by God’s grace and mercy that he was saved. But the lawyer didn’t see what Jesus wanted him to see. Instead, the lawyer shifted his goal to justifying himself. Jesus had told him to “do this,” but he already thought that he had. He had loved God like he should and his neighbor as himself—as long as “neighbor” was defined in a certain way. To see if Jesus saw things the way he did, he asked Jesus, “**And who is my neighbor?**”

This question was intended to prove to Jesus that the lawyer was needed to legally define what a neighbor is. After all, in the lawyer’s mind, since the Law was given by Moses to the Jews at the Mount Siani, then a neighbor had to be someone within the Jewish community, and he wanted to make that belief law. However, Jesus didn’t give the lawyer the justification he was looking for. Instead, Jesus showed that everyone is our neighbor, and therefore, **(1) we’re not to show our love just to those we think deserve it, but (2) we’re to show our love to everyone, just as Jesus loves all of us.**

In the parable, Jesus not only put the priest and the Levite, whom the lawyer would associate himself with, in a bad light, but he also put the Samaritan in a good light. The Samaritans were certainly not people whom the Jews would consider to be their neighbors. They were a mixed race and didn’t follow the Old Testament to the letter like the Jews did. But by using the Samaritan as the good example, Jesus made his point abundantly clear, so that even the lawyer had to admit it when he said that the one who “proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers” (verse 36) was “[t]he one who showed him mercy” (verse 37), or the good Samaritan.

When we hear accounts from the Bible like these, we can often times think to ourselves, “Yeah! You tell them Jesus!” However, we fail to realize that Jesus was not just speaking to the lawyer. He was speaking to all of us. Like the lawyer, there are those whom we don’t think deserve our love. Maybe it’s because they are murderers. Maybe it’s because they committed adultery. Maybe it’s because they didn’t keep a promise that they made. Or maybe it’s simply because they don’t belong to our group, like how the Jews viewed the Samaritans.

There are even times when we don’t think that those whom we would normally consider to be our neighbors deserve our love. In times like these, we act like the priest and the Levite, who passed by a fellow Jew in need of their help, simply because it wasn’t convenient for them. We might be willing to help someone in need, as long as it’s convenient for us or it benefits us. But, if we think that people have to deserve our love, then we also have to admit that we don’t deserve God’s love.

Since we have to keep the entire Law in order to earn God’s love, as Jesus told the lawyer, then we have to admit that we’ve failed. Sure, on the surface it may look like we’ve kept the entire Law, but Jesus shows us that it doesn’t take much to break the Law. We may think that we haven’t murdered anyone, but Jesus says that “everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:22). We may think that we haven’t committed adultery, but Jesus says that “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). We may think that we haven’t sworn falsely, but Jesus says, “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Matthew 5:37). We may think that we don’t have to show love to

our enemies, like how the Jews thought they didn't have to show love to the Samaritans, but Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). And these are just some of the ways that we fail to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We're like the man who was attacked by robbers; beaten, bloody, and clinging to life; except we're not the victim. We're that way because of the sins that we committed, and Jesus would have every right to pass us by on the other side of the road and leave us to the fate that we brought upon ourselves. But he didn't. Instead, like the good Samaritan, he came to help us in our time of need.

During his life on earth, Jesus was a good Samaritan in every way that we failed to be. He had compassion on those in need, feeding those who were hungry, healing those who were sick, and casting out demons. He didn't let the background of others stop him from helping them. In fact, he would often times associate with Samaritans and those whom the religious authorities considered sinners. He even showed love to his enemies, praying while he was on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). And he wasn't concerned for his own wellbeing, putting the wellbeing of others before his own, with the ultimate example of this being that he willingly laid down his own life for our benefit. As the apostle Paul says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

On the cross, Jesus paid the price for all of the times that you didn't show love to your neighbors. You did nothing to deserve the love that Jesus showed you, for you were completely helpless and dying on the side of the road. But Jesus washed your wounds with the waters of baptism, nursed you back to health by feeding you the medicine that is his own body and blood in the Lord's Supper, and clothed you with his own perfect and holy garments. Because of what Jesus did for you and still does for you, you haven't just received the forgiveness of sins that he won for you, but his perfect fulfillment of the Law has also been applied to your life. Now, the Father no longer sees the beaten and bloody sinner that you once were, but only the new man that his only begotten Son, Jesus, made you. This is the same message that Jesus was trying to get the lawyer to understand, that he had come to save sinners and open heaven to all who trust in him.

The lawyer didn't get the answer from Jesus that he was looking for. He thought that he had a better understanding of what a neighbor is than others did, and he thought that by showing love only to those whom he thought deserved it would earn him a place in heaven. Jesus showed him that his understanding of what a neighbor is was wrong and also that he needed the grace and mercy that only God can give in order to be saved. It is a message that the lawyer needed to hear, as well as all of us. We have not loved our neighbors like we should, but Jesus has loved us. Because of his love we now live, and because of his love we love one another as he has loved us.

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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