

"A Certain Man"

Luke 10:25-37 (Proper 10)

July 14, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week we learned that Jesus had set his face toward Jerusalem where He had an appointment with the cross. We read that He sent seventy-two disciples out into the countryside to prepare the towns and villages to receive Him as He made His way to that cross. As the disciples returned to Jesus, the Holy Spirit moved many of the people from those places to follow those disciples back to Jesus. Jesus was teaching those people when a lawyer had a question, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

This question tells us something about the lawyer. He believed in the resurrection or he would not ask about eternal life. He believed eternal life was a gift that we inherited. So he was on the right track, but as we often do, he assumed that there was something he could do to get on the right side of the person who made out the will. In effect, he was asking Jesus, "How can I get on God's good side so that He must put me in his last will and testament?"

The only way for anyone to do that is to keep the law perfectly. So, Jesus' response directed the lawyer to the law. He asked him to remember his training, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" In a way, Jesus was asking this lawyer, "What did you learn in your catechism class?"

The lawyer responded with the standard catechism answer. He quoted Moses 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." These words from Deuteronomy and from our Old Testament reading in Leviticus are the same words Jesus Himself used when people asked Him what the greatest law was. Love God. Love your neighbor.

Jesus commended the lawyer's answer, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

It is at this point that the lawyer asks for clarification, "And who is my neighbor?" He is really asking, "What is the minimum amount of love that I must dole out in order get on God's good side?" He didn't want to put himself out any more than was necessary. Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to help his disciples, this lawyer, and us understand God's standard for loving our neighbor.

Jesus started by describing a robbery. The crowd knew about robbers on the roads between the towns. Perhaps some of the people in the crowd had personal experience. You may know someone who is a victim of violent crime. Everyone feels sorrow for the poor victim in our story. Sin infects all cultures and we all have experiences that help us understand this poor victim.

Then Jesus introduced the priest and Levite. He was very careful to say that they were coming down from Jerusalem. This meant that they were finished with their duties in Jerusalem. If they were heading up to Jerusalem, they might be able to say that they were obeying the Laws of Moses especially the one that says, [Leviticus 21:1] "A priest must not make himself ceremonially

unclean for any of his people who die". Being ceremonially unclean would keep them from performing their duties in the temple. But they were heading away from Jerusalem, away from the temple. Jesus was careful to take away that excuse.

As the people were wondering why neither the priest nor the Levite helped this poor victim, Jesus dropped the hammer. He introduced a Samaritan. Now, when we think of Samaritans, we remember not only this Good Samaritan, but we also remember when Jesus healed ten lepers, the Samaritan was the only one who returned to say thank you. We also remember the Woman at the well in Samaria. Her encounter with Jesus converted her from a sinful woman with a bad reputation into an evangelist to her town. When we read the Bible with twenty-first century eyes, Samaritans seem to be very good people. Our culture honors these Samaritans by naming hospitals and nursing homes after them.

Samaritans had a very different image during Jesus' day. The Samaritan's image in Jesus' day was more like our image of Hamas or Al Qaeda. Samaritans were the mixed descendants of Israelites and gentiles. They represented people who did not keep themselves pure. A Jewish father would rather have his child dead than married to a Samaritan. So you can imagine the shock and offense when Jesus chose a Samaritan to be the hero in this story.

The Samaritan came along and he didn't just feel sorry for this poor victim as fellow human being who had some bad luck. He felt a deep, courageous, godly compassion for him. The Samaritan showed love to his enemy, to a person who hated him, to a person who considered him less than human. The Samaritan sacrificed his time, his comfort, even his safety to care for this poor victim. He did everything he could to help this poor man.

Then Jesus turned to the lawyer and said, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer was stuck. He was looking for an excuse to ignore his neighbor. He was looking for an excuse to love the lovable and despise the despicable. Instead, Jesus set a standard that loves the enemy, a standard that does good to those who wish us harm, a standard that is so high that no one can reach it. The lawyer wanted Jesus to change God's law and make it easier for him to earn his salvation. Our gospel says he was desiring to justify himself. Instead Jesus gave him this impossible standard that showed him he could never earn salvation.

We find ourselves in the same position as the lawyer. We may never see someone dying along the road, but we all meet unlovable people every day. What do we do when we meet these people? Do we honestly ask ourselves, "What would benefit that person the most? How can I help that person?" or do we find ways to avoid them and shun them? Do we pass them on the other side of the road? Do we follow the examples of the priest and the Levite most of the time and the example of the Samaritan only occasionally?

If we examine our souls with honest eyes, we realize that we fail to show love to our neighbor on a daily basis. In fact, if we look at ourselves spiritually, we realize that we are like that poor victim. We are spiritually dead in our sins. We have travelled down that dark road of willful disobedience. We have fallen among the robbers of Satan, the world, and our own sinful nature.

We lay, half-dead, along the spiritual road of our lives waiting for a future of eternal damnation. We are without hope and without help in ourselves.

Where can we turn? Can we turn to the law? Can we earn heaven with our own works? That would be like expecting help from the Priest and Levite in the story. The Priest and Levite trusted in the law, but they were no help. Spiritually, they were just as helpless as the victim. No, we are in desperate need of a Good Samaritan to rescue us before we are lost forever.

Who is that Good Samaritan? It is God's Champion, the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Life. God Himself stepped down from heaven onto this earth. He took on human flesh. He walked the roads of Palestine and taught about the Kingdom of God. The one who told the story of the Good Samaritan is our Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the only one who keeps the law perfectly. When the robbers of Sin, Death, and the devil attacked Him, He defeated them and He defeated them in the most unusual way. He allowed them to torture and crucify Him. Those robbers thought they had another victim, but God used the shame of the cross to defeat them. He rose from the dead and declared his victory over our enemies.

The Samaritan in our Gospel today had deep, godly, sacrificial love for his enemy. The Bible says, [Romans 5:8] "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus Christ traded places with us. He gave us his righteous life and He took our sin on Himself.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus carries us to safety. Not to an Inn, but to the Community of Saints, the Holy Christian Church. It is here, among other victims that our Good Samaritan has rescued, that we continue to recover. Just as the Good Samaritan told the innkeeper, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back", so also Jesus Christ tells us, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus Christ has given us a blank check signed in His blood. It is here among the saints that the Holy Spirit applies the comforting message of the Gospel. We can read God's Word again and again and always learn something new. It is here that we watch our Good Samaritan rescue another victim through the Holy Water of baptism. It is here that we confess our sins and receive His never-ending forgiveness. It is here that we receive the food of Christ's body and blood – a body and blood that we can never exhaust. We can never participate in the things of God too often. It is here that we receive the blessed assurance that we are truly the heirs of eternal life. It is here that we wait for our blessed Good Samaritan to return and take us to live with Him forever.

While we wait for our Good Samaritan to return, we meet other victims of sin, death, and the devil every day. We have the blessed opportunity to tell others how He rescued us. God works through our message to rescue these fellow victims. It is only after Jesus Christ, our Good Samaritan, rescues us that we can fulfill the Law of Christ and become Good Samaritans to others. We can't be Good Samaritans in ourselves, but Christ, our Good Samaritan can work through us. As God said through St. Paul, the apostle: [Philippians 4:13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me. God strengthens you too, as you hear the most wonderful news that you are forgiven all your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.