

Luke 10:23–37
13th Sun. after Trinity
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
September 3, 2023

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most well-known parables, yet also the least understood. The first thing that might come to mind when you hear “the Good Samaritan” are those “Good Samaritans” who go out of their way to help someone in need. God puts many such “Good Samaritans” in your life. Thank God for them! Or you might think of “Good Samaritan Laws,” designed to protect Good Samaritans from litigation, or requiring you to stop and help someone who is in need . . . or else.

The term “Good Samaritan” is well-known, but the meaning behind this parable remains hidden from most people. The inclination is to make it about us and our morality, man helping his fellow man in all situations and living in peace and charity in this world. That’s all upright and noble, but a true reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan will dig much deeper. It will show you who you truly are: not so much the Good Samaritan, but the man who fell among robbers, stripped naked, and beat half-dead. Or even the robber who committed the crime! Or the priest and Levite, who pass by because they think they have something more important to do. So often we want to make ourselves out to be the Good Samaritan. But first and foremost, that’s Jesus’s role. He is the Good Samaritan, who binds up our wounds and spares no expense to save us. Jesus is the Good Samaritan, and only in Him are you a good Samaritan, too.

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Of course, this lawyer, this teacher of God’s Law, misunderstands what it means to inherit

something. There's nothing you can actively do to inherit eternal life. Eternal life is the free gift of God in Christ Jesus. It can only be received passively, like, well, an inheritance. What do you do to inherit something, whether that be money, land, a house, or your favorite household goods? Do you have to work overtime at the chores, or make sure to call home twice a week? Do you have to fill out an application or maintain a certain behavioral standard? Of course not! Inheritance is based not on what you've done but on who you are, or more precisely put, on *whose* you are. You inherit because you are a relative of the deceased. You were born into the family and receive blessings based on that and that alone. Of course, you could always squander your inheritance, or refuse it, or cut yourself off from the family and miss out that way. To reject the inheritance is a choice, but to receive it is by grace alone. That's the way it works in God's family as well. You receive the inheritance of eternal life not because of what you do, but because of who you are and because of whose you are as a baptized child of God.

Jesus wants to show this lawyer that his question is messed up. So Jesus asks: "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" The lawyer knows God's Law and He knows the life it promises to those who keep it: "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." The lawyer's answer is a perfect summary of God's Law, taken almost directly from the second giving of the Law, the book of Deuteronomy. Love God and love your neighbor. God's Law is all about love.

Jesus Himself says that the first and greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39). When you see depictions of Moses with the Ten Commandments, you might have noticed the division of commandments on the two stone tablets. On the first tablet are etched commandments one

through three, the commandments dealing with our vertical relationship with God: You shall have no other gods, do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, remember the Sabbath Day. On the second tablet are etched commandments four through ten, the commandments dealing with our horizontal relationship with one another: honor father and mother, don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't covet. God's Law for mankind is all about love: loving God and loving others by doing or not doing certain things. The lawyer's interpretation of God's Law was exactly right.

That's why Jesus responds: "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." In the Law of Moses, God repeatedly promises the people life and warns them against sin leading to death. Do this and you will live. Don't do this, and you will die. Love the LORD and love your neighbor, showing that love in thought, word, and deed, and you will have an abundant life. When people hear that the Law is all about love, they might think like this lawyer: "Great! I love God and I love other people, so I must be good." The lawyer presses further, trying to justify himself, trying to rationalize those times he might not have come across as so loving to others. The lawyer asks: "And who is my neighbor?" He wants to limit the definition of neighbor to include only those whom he wants to help. To see anyone God puts in your life as a neighbor would be an undue burden! So the common thinking goes.

That's when Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Notice how the priest and the Levite come across the man who fell among robbers, laying there half dead, and they pass by on the other side of the road. They don't want to look too long at this despicable sight. The more they know, the more they're obligated to help. So if they pretend they don't see, then they can keep going on to the more important things they think they have to do: like teaching God's Word, serving at the altar, and so on. If anyone should've known love not in word

only, but in deed and in truth (1 Jn 3:18), it would be the priest and the Levite. Yet somehow they justify their actions and keep on going. Out of sight, out of mind.

The priest and the Levite represent the teachers of the Law: all the priests and Levites, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the scribes and the lawyers, like this man who stood up to put Jesus to the test. These are the people who knew God's Word, but weren't able to apply it or live it out. They cherished God's Word for its truth and its beauty, because it was passed down to them from their forefathers, and because it gave them a position of authority. Yet they pass by on the other side rather than use their position to help someone in desperate need. That's not love or fulfilling the Law, not even close.

How often do we find ourselves in similar situations, trying to avoid the true work of our vocations, those places where God has called us to serve? We love God's Word, we hold it sacred and cherish it, and yet when it comes time to live out the Christian life in reality we fall so short. We know what we ought to do in love but don't do it. We see those in need but wait for someone else to step up and help. Or we help, but our heart is not in it. We think we have more important things to do, godly things, even, and so we can justify not serving the neighbor God has put right before us. Or we grumble about it. So often this occurs without us even knowing it, because our sinful nature is so quick to excuse our actions. And even when we want to do right, evil lies close at hand. We delight in God's law, but in our actions we see the sin that dwells within us. Who will deliver us from this body of death?!

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! In our sin, when we turn in on ourselves and love grows cold, we are like the man who fell among robbers, stripped of our righteousness, beaten, and left half-dead. On our own, we have nothing but sin and death. We can in no way help ourselves. The unreachable standards of God's holy Law cannot help us. Someone else has

to step in and do what the Law could not do (Romans 8:3). Someone else has to take notice, actually stop, and help us out of this miserable situation. Enter the Good Samaritan. Samaritans were hated by the Jewish people. They were half-breeds, Gentile sinners who thought they worshiped the true God. They lived in Israel, but were not of the people of Israel. And so they were shunned and rejected, a byword to any true Israelite. Jesus is the Good Samaritan. He comes from somewhere else, from Heaven to Earth, from God to man. He was in the world, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a true Samaritan indeed.

And yet it is the rejected one, our LORD Jesus Christ, the Good Samaritan, who stoops down to save you. His rejection means your acceptance by God. His wounds mean your healing, in body and soul. His suffering on the cross means eternal joy for you. His shame takes away your shame. He who knew no sin became sin, that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. There's no need to justify yourself when you fall into sin, into the hands of the enemy, when you fall into unloving thoughts, words, and deeds. Jesus Himself is your justification, your righteousness apart from the Law (Romans 3:21). He is your eternal peace before God and man.

Jesus, the Good Samaritan sees you and in compassion He comes to you. He binds up your wounds and begins to nurse you back to health. It's interesting here that the Greek word for "wounds" is basically "trauma." Jesus knows not only your physical wounds, but your invisible wounds, the trauma you've suffered. He knows your sins and the sins that have been committed against you, everything you feel ashamed of. Jesus knows all your wounds and He covers them. He takes them upon Himself. He pours on them the healing oil and wine of His Word and Sacraments. Jesus brings you to the inn of the church, which is a hospital for sin-sick sinners. And Jesus leaves you in the hands of a pastor and a Christian congregation, saying: "Take care of

him. Take care of her. Whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.” Jesus is fully invested in your well-being, now and forever. He promises to see you through to the end.

So who was the neighbor to the man who fell among robbers? It was Jesus, the Good Samaritan. Jesus is the Good Samaritan, a true neighbor indeed, because He is the one who shows mercy. Now you, dear Christian, go and do likewise. As God loves you, now you love others. As Christ forgives you, now you forgive those who sin against you. As Jesus has mercy on you, now you go and show mercy to everyone God brings into your life. When someone is in need, spiritually or physically, help them. Bring them to Jesus. Bring them to the inn of the church, the hospital for sinners. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). And “now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2 Thess 2:16-17). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.