

274. Luke 10:23–37
Trinity XIII
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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,

Last week we spoke about the principle *lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of praying is the law of believing. What you believe affects how you worship. Jesus continues opening ears and loosing tongues that we might hear His Word, take it to heart, and proclaim it before the world. For today's reading about the Good Samaritan, you could alter that principle a bit and turn *lex orandi, lex credendi* into *lex orandi, lex operandi*, the law of praying is the law of working, the way you worship won't just find expression in words, it will also be shown in action, in good works for the neighbor, regardless of who that neighbor is. The Christian faith is not only made evident in what is said. The Christian faith is also made evident in what is done. Another way of saying this could be "actions speak louder than words." The Christian faith is made manifest in acts of love for the neighbor, regardless of who that neighbor is.

A lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The lawyer's question is confused from the beginning because he assumes with the rest of the world that you can do something to inherit eternal life, that the good things we have from God are a simple transaction. But if you listen carefully, you can tell the question is wrong. "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?" You don't do anything to inherit. To receive an inheritance, you just are. You exist. You're part of the family. Nobody deserves an inheritance. It comes by grace alone. With God even more so. God adopts you into His family in Holy Baptism. He makes you His child and as a child of God you are automatically an heir of eternal life.

There's nothing you can do to inherit eternal life because Jesus has already done everything for you. He won eternal life for you and He gives eternal life to you starting already now.

But to get at the lawyer's error, Jesus responds: "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" Jesus answers the lawyer on the lawyer's own terms, in concepts the lawyer can readily understand. The lawyer is a man of the Law, in this case God's Law. He has spent some time studying God's Law and learning to apply it to different situations. And the Law always commands. It always says "do this" or "don't do this." The Law is all about action and the lawyer wants something to do.

The lawyer responded correctly. He understands the Law at its heart, that the Law of God is all about love: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" That's the first table of the Law, a summary of the first three commandments, which deal with our relationship to God. Then comes the second table of the Law, commandments four through ten, which deal with our relationship to other people: "...love your neighbor as yourself." The Law of God is all about love. Love God and love other people. That's what God's Law requires, not just action or inaction, but a heart that loves God and other people.

"You have answered correctly," Jesus said; "do this, and you will live." Do this and eternal life will be yours. Love God above all things and love your neighbor as yourself and you will live forever. The Law promises eternal life to those who follow it perfectly. But since we fall into sin, the chief purpose of God's Law is not to give us a way of attaining eternal life on our own. The chief purpose of God's Law right now is to show us our sin. God's Law is held up to us as a mirror that we might learn to recognize our sins, our imperfections, our weaknesses, and our

failings in light of His perfect will. The perfect Law of love reveals how cold and unloving our sinful hearts can be.

The lawyer desired to justify himself. He wanted to be right with God, so he used his critical thinking skills to come up with a solution. When sinful man is confronted with God's Law, he's tempted either to make other people look worse, to make himself look better, or to weaken the Law. That's what the lawyer does here. He tries to water down God's Law to make it go down easier, to make it doable. So the lawyer asks: "And who is my neighbor?" He knows the Law demands perfect love towards God and perfect love towards our neighbor, so he tries to make the law manageable by limiting what neighbor might mean. Who exactly is my neighbor? Just the people I know? The people who live next door? Those I work with? So Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate what it looks like to love your neighbor as yourself.

To understand this story you have to understand how much the Jews hated the Samaritans. Samaritans were considered worse than Gentiles and unbelievers, because they were those things, but at the same time they tried to imitate the worship of the Jews. Samaritans were half-breeds. They were partly descended from Jews taken into captivity by Assyria. But they were mixed with other pagan nations and then sent back to Israel. A true Jew would hate the loathsome Samaritans.

So Jesus tells a parable where the Samaritan is the good guy. The Samaritan, the least expected, is the one who acts as a true neighbor to the man in distress. Jesus's point is that everyone could potentially be your neighbor, and you could potentially be everyone else's neighbor. Anyone God brings into your life is your neighbor, no matter what you might think of that person. With God all partiality and all preconceived notions go out the window. Each and every person you encounter is created in the image of God. Everyone you know, whether you

love them or hate them, whether they help you or hurt you, whether they annoy you or whether they disagree with you, each and every person is precious in the sight of God on account of Jesus Christ.

The man who goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho stands for fallen mankind. The man fell among robbers as we fell among the Devil, who stripped us of righteousness, beat us, and departed, leaving us half dead on the roadside. Without help, the half dead man would soon be fully dead. Without help from the outside, we would die in our sins and be lost eternally.

A priest was going down the same road and decided to pass by on the other side. Out of sight, out of mind. The Levite also passed by on the other side. Out of sight, out of mind. The priest and the Levite are like this lawyer. They are teachers of the Law. They understand the Word of God. They've studied it more than anyone. But that Word of God apparently has little effect on their life. They focus on learning God's Word and performing the sacrifices required by the Law, but then they neglect the weightier matters of God's Law: loving God and loving others by helping those in need.

Of course, whoever it was that robbed this man and left him half dead is violating the Fifth Commandment: "You shall not murder." What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body. That much is clear. The Law of love was already violated when the robbers stole from this man and then left him to die. But the priest and the Levite also violate the Fifth Commandment. We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, *but help and support him in every physical need*. Every commandment has a prohibition, "do not," but also a positive element. We sin either by what we do or by what we leave undone. The priest and the Levite thought they had something better to do. Or they didn't want to make themselves unclean. And so the priest and

the Levite, those who ought to understand the things of God the best, show that they don't understand a word. For all that they'll have to answer before the judgment seat of God, for violating the divine Law of love.

Ironically, it's the Samaritan, the Gentile sinner, hated by any self-respecting Israelite, who ends up helping the man. This Samaritan puts the priest and the Levite to shame. Where they looked the other way and passed by the dying man, the Samaritan sacrifices to take care of this stranger. The Samaritan bound up the man's wounds and anointed him with oil and wine for healing. Then he set the hurt man on his own animal and took him to the nearest inn to take care of him. The Samaritan even left a downpayment to pay for any further medical costs. The priest and the Levite represent God's perfect Law of love, but they don't fulfill that Law. In another touch of irony, the priest and the Levite are so focused on the Law of love that they don't fulfill the Law of love. It's left to the hated Samaritan to do that.

When you look at icon depictions of the Good Samaritan, like the one on the bulletin cover, you'll notice that Jesus is depicted as the Good Samaritan. He is the foreigner, the man from Heaven, the half-breed, the God-man, who stopped to help where the Law could not. The priest and the Levite represent God's perfect Law of love, but they fail. They pass right by and don't put that love into action. But Jesus, the Good Samaritan, embodies the perfect love of God the Father. His love is not just in thoughts and words, but in deed and in truth. Where the Law increases the trespass and shows our sin for the mortal wound it truly is, Jesus comes to us in the Gospel of free forgiveness won for us on the cross.

The Samaritan had compassion on the half-dead man, and that word "compassion" in the New Testament is only ever used of Jesus. In John 8, Jesus was accused of being a Samaritan and having a demon. Our Lord denied having a demon. But He never denied being a Samaritan.

Jesus is the Good Samaritan, who binds up our wounds with the salve of His Word and Sacraments. He carries us to the Church, the hospital for sinners, and leaves a downpayment to take care of us until He returns. You are the one half-dead who fell among robbers and murderers. The Law can't help, no matter how good its lofty language about love sounds. Only Jesus can help and He certainly does!

Jesus asked the lawyer: "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer couldn't even bring himself to answer "the Samaritan." He said: "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus showed mercy and He continues to show mercy. He is your neighbor, your friend, your brother who takes care of you in all times of need. Jesus has compassion on you and He shows you mercy. He restores your life. He brings healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones (Prov 3:8).

Jesus responded: "You go, and do likewise." As the LORD has loved you, so you ought to love one another and all people. As the LORD has forgiven you, so you ought to forgive one another and all people. As the LORD has shown mercy and compassion to you, so you ought to show mercy and compassion to one another and to all people. God's perfect Law of love is an impossible standard for a sinner to measure up to. But God has compassion on you. He forgives your sin in Jesus Christ and shows you a love that you are able, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to reflect in this life. God has done all things for you in Jesus Christ and He renews you day by day. He blesses you that you might be a blessing to others. God's perfect Law of love is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And as renewed children of God you are now able to start loving others as you have been loved in Jesus Christ. You no longer have to pretend to serve God while neglecting to take care of the people God has brought into your life. You are free to be open to the paths God would have you go, to be open to the people God brings into your life. Jesus has been a good

neighbor and a good Samaritan to you. Now you go and do likewise. 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 Creed.