

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – July 14, 2019
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (26) "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" (27) He answered, " '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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (28) "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." (29) But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (30) In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. (31) A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. (32) So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33) But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. (34) He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. (35) The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' (36) "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (37) The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." **Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."**

Dear Friends in Christ:

Our text for today is one which is familiar to most Christians. You probably heard studied this parable in Sunday School or Christian Day School or in your confirmation instructions. It's a classic parable which many of us have probably heard over and over again. We may assume that because we know the details of the parable that there's no need for us to review it again. But knowledge of the Scripture is intended to be used. The expert in the law who challenged Jesus with the questions "What must I do to be saved and who is my neighbor?" knew the Scriptures. He could recite Bible passages from memory. But although he knew lots – he failed to use his knowledge. He didn't believe what the Scriptures taught and he didn't do what they required. It is easy for all of us to fall into that same trap especially when we are considering a familiar portion of Scripture. It's important for us to gladly hear the Word and put it into practice. (cf. Luke 8:21) As we consider the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan once again we will hear Jesus say: "Go and Do Likewise." Jesus' words

1. confront us with our sins
2. point us to the love of Christ and
3. provide us with a model to follow

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan as a part of his conversation with an expert in the Old Testament law – we might speak of him as a professor of Bible History. Not only was he familiar with what the Bible taught about the Law of God – he was also familiar with the various teachings and regulations which the Jewish religious teachers and scholars (the rabbis) had added to God's law in an effort to insure its observance in every detail as they believed.

It is quite likely that this man had heard Jesus speak to 72 of his followers and announce to them that they were blessed because of the things they had seen and heard from him. The concept of salvation by faith in the promised Savior was foreign to this expert in the OT Law who was absolutely convinced that an individual had to do something to secure God's favor and eternal life. That is the reason he challenged Jesus with the question: "**Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**"

His question was carefully structured to catch Jesus in a teaching which would contradict the teachings of the Jewish religious experts. He wanted to know what it was that he could do to make it possible for him to be rewarded with eternal life.

Jesus knew that this man was posing a test for him. He also knew that this man needed to not only know what the law said but to believe what it said. That's why Jesus answered him with two questions of his own which encouraged him to take a hard look at the Law of God. **"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"** The expert in the Law of Moses had no choice but to answer Jesus' question and he answered by quoting from memory Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. **"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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"**

From these verses we can surely understand why Paul wrote in Romans 13:10, **"Love is the fulfillment of the law."** Love for God is indeed the essence of the Law. The passages the expert quoted remind us that love for God is a worship and a service that is not just an outward mechanical action. True worship and true service flows from God's love for us. That love is to change our selfish sinful hearts so that our entire life and being overflows in service to the Lord our God – the God of free and faithful grace who saves his people from their sins and the God of power. The person who trusts in the grace of God and desires to respond to that grace will not just love God but he will show his love for God as he loves his neighbor as himself. Each of us naturally has a great deal of love for ourselves. If we would deal with our neighbor with the same consideration, concern, patience and generosity as we show ourselves – this would be the kind of love the Law of God requires of us.

Jesus could see that the expert in the Law was not responding to the grace of the Lord – it was his desire and intention to gain God's favor with his own deeds. So Jesus replied: **"You have answered correctly," "Do this and you will live."**

Although it was Jesus intention to point out the impossibility of earning salvation and the need for the grace of God – the expert refused to see his sins in the mirror of the Law. His conscience must have bothered him when the law accused him of his failures to love his neighbor so he looks for a loop hole in God's law. He wants to know just who his neighbor is – so that he can excuse his lack of love for some people. Our text tells us that the expert in the law wanted to justify himself so he asked Jesus a follow up question. Jesus had made him look silly for asking his original question – but now the expert wanted to save face so he asked: **"And who is my neighbor?"**

It is in response to this question that Jesus told the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. In case we have not already been convicted of our failure to love or in case we are willing to make excuses for our lack of love this parable clearly confronts us with our sins and points out to us that the more important question to answer is, "how do you show that you are a neighbor?"

Generally the Jews would have defined their neighbors as one of their own people, one of their country men. Our word neighbor comes from two old words neigh = near and bor – from the Dutch word for farmer. Literally the word means the farmer living nearby. With the change from a rural society to an urban or suburban society the word neighbor for us has changed to mean those who live close to us – those in our apartment complex, on the same block, subdivision, or town.

The Scriptural definition is a bit broader than that – Jesus parable shows that our neighbor includes anyone we come into contact with. This might refer to everyday physical contact – like the individuals in Jesus parable had. But it may be that our contact isn't physical. For instance we may hear about the needs of war refugees, orphans, and the poor in Ukraine or the hungry in Indonesia through a newsletter or the WELS connection. Then love for God will prompt us to extend a helping hand of love to these neighbors as we respond to their needs with our prayers and quite possibly even with our gifts.

In Jesus parable the Priest (one who served in the temple where love for God and neighbor were encouraged) and the Levite (one who also had close contact with God's word as he assisted the priests in the temple) saw a man in need and passed him by.

They had considered the situation and concluded that the dying man was not their neighbor: he wasn't a close relative or friend or anyone they owed a favor. In their opinion he didn't deserve their help nor were they obligated to help according to their understanding of the law. Clearly the love of God had not touched their hearts even though they knew what it said.

But in contrast when a Samaritan passed the man in need, he stopped, gave him first aid, transported him to a comfortable place and made provisions for his future care. Not only were these individuals strangers – they were a Jew and Samaritan.

Jesus says that a Samaritan had pity on the man who was in need. I'm sure you recall that the Jews normally treated Samaritans as enemies and traitors because they were people of a mixed race and mixed religion. The Good Samaritan put Jesus words: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" into action. Jesus had clearly answered the question who is my neighbor by showing that our neighbor is any person whose need is evident and whom we can help.

Now Jesus asks the expert in the law another question: **"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" 37) The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."**

By turning the experts question around, Jesus made him state the answer to his own question once again. When Jesus told the expert to go and do likewise, he wanted the expert to realize that because his heart was not right; his thoughts and actions were also wrong. In a gentle way Jesus was pointing out the expert's sins and his needs for the grace of God and a Savior to lead him way from his belief that he could do something to inherit eternal life.

But it's not just the sinful heart and actions of the expert that have been laid bear. This parable has also confronted us with our sins. At times we act as if believed that our actions or at least our status as church members is something which earns us favor with God. At times we seek to justify or excuse our behavior by making excuses for our failures to love those people who are near to us in the family of God or who need our help.

The parable of the Good Samaritan shows us just how far the demands of God's law really go. The early Christian church saw the love of Christ described in Jesus description of the Good Samaritan. This parable points us to the love of Christ in a variety of ways. First we see that love as Jesus patiently deals with the expert he wanted to test him – Jesus patiently deals with his enemy. Secondly we can't help but think of the love and the compassion of our Savior for us when we hear him speak of the actions of the Samaritan. Satan beats us up with his temptations and leaves us to die. But Jesus gave his life to rescue us from Satan's power. Isaiah 53:4-6 reminds us: **Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5) But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6) We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** (NIV)

Our Savior has held nothing back to help us in our desperate and helpless condition. He laid down his life to rescue us from eternal death and give us eternal life as a gift of pure grace. There's

nothing we could do to make ourselves worthy to receive this gift – this parable has reminded us of that by confronting us with our sins. This parable has also pointed us to the grace and love of Christ. When that love touches our hearts with the good news of forgiveness then through faith in Christ we will begin to show our love for God in our lives. We can follow the Samaritan as a model as we gladly assist those who need our help.

We may be familiar with this parable but as we have seen the lessons it has taught us are lessons which we can use everyday. Every day we need to be confronted with our sins and led to trust in Jesus. Every day we need examples of love to follow. May we never grow weary of hearing, believing and following the classic lessons taught in this parable and in other familiar portions of God's Word. Amen.