

July 10, 2022
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 10:25-37 (Colossians 1:1-14)

A CALL TO FAITH IN CHRIST AND SERVICE TOWARD MY NEIGHBOR

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 10th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

The story of the Good Samaritan is often preached from one of two different perspectives. On the one hand, by looking at the story through the lens of God's **Law** it is preached as a **call to action** in love toward the neighbor. On the other, by looking through the lens of the **Gospel**, it is preached as a **call to faith** in Jesus. A quick refresher:

- **The Law** shows us our sin. It teaches what we are to do and what we are not to do. It shows the wrath of God against our sin, and our desperate need for a Savior.
- **The Gospel** shows us our Savior. It teaches us what God has done, and still is doing for us, in Christ Jesus for our salvation, bringing us God's grace and favor.

From a Law perspective the story of the Good Samaritan is preached as a **call to action**, what you are to do and not to do for your neighbor. Even unbelievers know this. Even they describe a good Samaritan as a person who goes above and beyond the call of duty to help others in need. So, it is easy to see why the story could be interpreted as a moralistic **call to action** to help others who are, **figuratively speaking**, beaten half to death and lying along the road. It is loving your neighbor as yourself.

From a Gospel perspective, the Good Samaritan is preached as a call to **faith in Jesus**. Instead of inserting your narcissistic self into the story as the savior and hero... a Gospel perspective teaches that **you** are the person lying near death along the road. The fact is, it is true, you and I have been robbed and beaten and left for dead along the road by the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. You are the one who is completely incapacitated and unable to help yourself. And, it is Jesus, the Good Samaritan, who sees you bleeding and left for dead. He comes and saves you. He gets down on His hands and knees in the dirt and the mud and the blood and the tears and has compassion on you. He binds up your wounds, bears your burden, and pays the price of your healing. In that case, the story sounds like a **call to faith** in Jesus so that you **love God** with all your heart, all of your mind, and all of your strength.

So, which perspective is correct? If the story is **only** a moralistic **call to action** to love your neighbor, you and I are no different than the lawyer in our text. He is not a modern lawyer like we would recognize but an expert in the Old Testament Law of Moses. He stands up with a

question to put Jesus to the test, hoping that His answer will conflict with his own interpretation of the Law – so that he then can bring charges against Him. He asks Jesus:

“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)

The lawyer might be wise, understanding, and well educated in the Law and traditions of the Jews, but he asks a foolish question. No one does anything to receive an inheritance. An inheritance is something that is given – not earned or purchased. Besides that, God has already answered his question in the Law, so Jesus asks the lawyer for his interpretation. He replies:

“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.”²⁸ ***And [Jesus] said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”*** (Luke 10:26–28)

Do this – and you will live. Love God with every bit of your entire being. God the Father Almighty will not allow subtractions or divisions or substitutions of your love for Him because nothing that He has created can compare with His glory and might. No one else is worthy. And then love your neighbor as yourself.

The lawyer has a problem. He correctly understands that one must keep God’s Law perfectly – if he is going to ***earn*** eternal life. His problem is the same problem that you and I have. It is one thing to know what you are ***supposed*** to do. It is quite another to ***do it*** as perfectly as God demands. The lawyer had made his life all about the Law. He is someone who has boasted in his obedience to the Law. But he now needs a loophole to justify his works and make himself appear righteous. And that is where you and I are in the same predicament as the lawyer. You and I and all mankind attempt to justify our words, works, and deeds in attempt to make ourselves appear righteous before God.

Ever since Adam and Eve’s fall into sin all men, women and children are by nature sinful and fall way short of the glory of God. Everyone has an excuse. Everyone attempts to justify themselves. Eve blamed the serpent for her sin. Adam blamed God for creating the woman. You and I blame each other and make excuses in attempt to justify why we do not keep God’s Law as perfectly as He demands. Like Adam and Eve, like the lawyer in our text, you and I try to deflect the blame back on God and redefine the terms and change the definitions so that they say what we want them to say. Desiring to justify yourself you ask a host of questions such as:

- “Who is my neighbor?” implying that there is someone out there somewhere that is not your neighbor.
- You ask: “When does life begin?” implying there is a time when a pregnant woman is not really pregnant.
- You ask: “What makes a marriage?” implying that any combination of sexes and number of individuals can create a marriage.
- You ask: “What is a man? What is a woman?” or, let’s throw them all in the same barrel and label it: “Did God actually say fill in the blank?”

Jesus answers the lawyer’s question, illustrating exactly who is a neighbor to any person at any time and place. He tells the story of a man who had been robbed and beaten and left for dead along the road. Apart from someone coming along and saving him, this man is without hope.

By chance a priest came along and saw the beaten and dying man. But apparently, he had more important priestly duties to attend to – so he passed by on the other side. Then a Levite, a religious worker in the temple, came along and saw the dying man – and he too, passed by on the other side. Both passed by their neighbor in need.

This leaves the Samaritan. In modern times people think that Samaritans are kind, caring, and helpful people. But in Bible days, the Jews despised the Samaritans and the Samaritans despised the Jews. You could say it's a little like the modern-day relationship between the Palestinians and the Israelis or the relationship between you and the person you despise most.

When the Samaritan saw the man lying at death's door along the road, he had compassion on him. In the original language, every use of this verb **compassion** in the Gospels describes the gut wrenching **compassion** and **sympathy** that Jesus has for those in need of a Savior. (TDNT, 553-555) Jesus came to serve sinners and has **compassion** on them. While you are still a sinner, He saw you helpless and harassed in your sin and has **compassion**. He came to crawl down into the messy trodden-down road of your life where you lay bloody, beaten, and half-dead in your transgressions and has compassion on you.

He came so that He might take your place along your dark, lonely, and deadly road of sin. He came to carry your sins and transgressions to Calvary's cross where He would be beaten, bloodied, and nailed to the cross until – He was not just merely near death but was most sincerely dead on your behalf. He came to bind up your wounds – and by His wounds you are healed. He forgives you of your sins, and releases you from the guilt and consequences of your sins.

So, perhaps the main point of the story is **not a call to action** in loving your neighbor but a **call to faith** in Christ Jesus. He is the One who left the glory of heaven to enter this dark and lonely world to bind up and heal the wounds of beaten down people, living dark and lonely lives. He's a friend of tax collectors and sinners, prostitutes and lepers. He is a friend to today's lawyers and engineers, laborers, retirees, moms and dads and children and all those who need a Savior.

But there is still a problem. It is hard to call the story **ONLY call to faith** in Jesus when you and I are in the same position as the lawyer in our text. Like the lawyer, you recognize in the story that it is the Samaritan who showed mercy and proved to be a neighbor to the man beaten and near death. Right? And just as Jesus says to the lawyer, He says to you:

“You go, and do likewise.” (Luke 10:37)

As it turns out, our Gospel story is not an **either/or**: either a **call to action** or a **call to faith**. It is a **both/and**. The story of the Good Samaritan is both a **call to faith** in Jesus and a **call to love** your neighbor. Not only the neighbor that you like but to whoever needs you. Can you do it as perfectly as God commands? Of course not, but that does not mean that you should not try. It is God's good and perfect will for your life and He strengthens you to do so.

The Good Samaritan took the near dead man to an inn where he rested, was nourished, and restored to health. That is exactly what Jesus, the Good Samaritan has done and continues to do

for you. In Baptism He breathed new life into your sin-beaten and dead body, and gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, life, and salvation. He grafted you into His body of believers in the holy Ark of His Church where you receive your sabbath rest, nourishment, and restoration by means of His Word and Sacrament. In St John's 1st epistle letter he writes:

"¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:10–11)

You have experienced God's love – and having experienced God's love – you are strengthened to love and serve your neighbor. God does not need your good works and deeds, but your neighbor does. God has prepared them in advance for you. And in His story of the Good Samaritan Jesus teaches who your neighbor is – and – how you, brother and sister in Christ, are to live as His chosen and adopted children in this world. How are you to live? St Paul sums it up nicely, writing:

"... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

You love God because He first loved you. And what does God's love look like? Paul continues:

¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:10–14)

Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord who calls us to faith in Him and to service and love of our neighbor.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.