

13th Sunday after Trinity, September 3, 2023

Readings: 2 Chronicles 28: 8-15, Galatians 3: 15-22, Luke 10: 23-37

Jesus Is Our Good Samaritan

The Law cannot help us or give us life. Rather, it confines everyone under sin as wounded and naked before God (Gal. 3:15–22). So it is that two figures of the Law, the priest and the Levite, passed by the injured man on the side of the road (Luke 10:23–37). Only the promised Seed of Abraham can rescue us and make us righteous before God. Only the Samaritan, our Lord Jesus, had compassion, as did the Samaritans of old (2 Chronicles 28:8–15). He came down to us in our lost and dying condition, pouring on the oil and wine of the Sacraments. He placed us on His own animal, bearing our sin and brokenness in His body on the cross to restore us. Jesus brought us to the inn, that is, the Church, and gave the innkeeper two denarii, that His double forgiveness might continue to be ministered to us. In this way the Lord, by whose Law we are torn and stricken, heals us and revives us by His Gospel and raises us up with Himself.

Sermon Transcript

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

The Good Samaritan. I almost said Prodigal Son because that's my favorite parable. But this is the Good Samaritan. Everybody knows the Good Samaritan, including the outside world. I mean, we have news articles that talk about the Good Samaritan who saved these people from the fire or whatever. We have this term Good Samaritan, so we think we understand what this parable is talking about, but do we really? I mean, we tend to think that this parable is encouraging us to be like the Good Samaritan, to treat everybody as our neighbor. And to one degree that is true. I mean, we are called to love our neighbor. We're called to bear witness to our friends and family out there, to show mercy and love and compassion to those who are in need. But ultimately and primarily, this parable is really not about that. Because if you look at the very beginning of the parable, how does it start? What's the setup for this parable? The setup is a lawyer is going to Jesus and he's trying to test Jesus. He's trying to get Jesus to trip up, to make a mistake or do something wrong. He asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now, that is the question that everybody has ultimately in our lives. Everybody throughout the world, especially as we get towards the end of our life, tend to be questioning, now, what comes next? Is there life after death? What does it look like and what must I do to make sure I'm on the right side of it, on the good side. A lot of times, most religions in the world, in fact, have the very same answer on what we must do. Every religion out there in the world says, "If you do X, Y, and Z, then you will get the reward that comes afterwards." Now, it really doesn't matter what X, Y, and Z is, whether it's in Islam or Buddhism or Scientology or Wiccan or any other religion out there. They all have their parameters on what you have to do. Do this and you'll receive this. At first it sounds like Jesus is saying the same thing. He asks the guy, the lawyer, "What does the law say?" The lawyer says, "Well, love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbors as yourself." Jesus says, "Well, that's right. Go and do that." Initially, it sounds like Jesus is saying, "You also need to obey and do X, Y, and Z." In our case, that's the 10 Commandments. No other gods, don't misuse His name, honor the Sabbath Day, and so on and so forth. But that's not really what He's saying because we need to get into what it is about the law that we

can and cannot fulfill. The lawyer, trying to justify himself, asks Jesus, "Okay, so now who's my neighbor?" Now, what the lawyer really is saying is, what is the minimum requirement that you have for me to do in order for me to be right with God? I mean, that's what he's saying, and that's not really that unfamiliar to the rest of us. When we think about it, a lot of times we think, what is the minimum that I got to do to pass? What's the bare minimum that I need to do to serve God so that He'll be okay with me, so that my scales balance out at least enough so that the good just outweighs the bad? It's a very common question that we have.

But if you look at our Galatians passage, Paul makes it very clear that that's the wrong question. Who is my neighbor? In other words, he's saying, what is the bare minimum of the law that I need to follow? Whereas Galatians and Paul makes it very clear, the law is not there to help guide you into what you have to do to get a passing mark. The law is there to condemn you and to crucify you and to kill you in your sin. See, the law is not about what can I do in order to be saved? Well, it is, but the answer is obey the law perfectly, 100% of the time from the moment you're born to the moment you die without any mistakes or trip-ups ever. If you can do that, then fine, obey the law and you will be saved. But we all know if we're honest with ourselves that we have not come close. We have not come remotely close to obeying the law. So the law is only there to show us our sin and to show us how far we have fallen and what we need.

So here is the parable. The guy is trying to find out what law he has to obey and what law he can kind of fudge and ignore. How far does he have to go? It's a confrontational discussion that is going on here. So when Jesus tells the lawyer, "Go and do likewise like the Good Samaritan," that's not an encouragement, that's more of a condemnation. Much like the other time when the rich young man came to Jesus and said, "What must they do to be saved?" And Jesus says, "Well, love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul and love your neighbor as yourself." The young man says, "I've done that since my youth." Jesus says, "Okay, one last thing, sell everything you have, every possession that you have, and give it all to the poor and come follow Me." The guy said, "Nope, can't do that. I love my money too much. I love my creature comforts. I love to be at ease in my life. I cannot give up my wealth. That really is my God." Jesus was not trying to be mean or nasty, but He was trying to help the young man understand that he did not follow the law and that he was disobeying his God so that he might put his trust not in his money, but in his God.

So let's look at this parable again. We've got the Levite and the priest who should have known better. They knew the law, but they followed the law to the letter, because they knew the law said, if you touch a dead body, you're unclean. And if you're unclean, you can't serve God in the temple. You can't go in and do the worship. You can't fellowship with other people. To become clean again takes an extended amount of time and several sacrifices and an examination by a priest to declare you clean once more. Well, that was bothersome, that was going to get in the way of them doing the work of God, and so they avoided what looked like a dead person. They were following the law at its bare minimum, the letter of the law. The Samaritan on the other hand, and we know that the Samaritans were not exactly the most beloved of people in the nation of Israel. I mean, we have this passage from 2 Chronicles about Samaria coming and attacking Judah, the northern tribes attacking the southern tribes, because surprise, surprise, the southern tribes, the Jews, were not following God the way they ought to have been. So this time, instead of sending poisonous snakes or fire or opening up the earth and swallowing the disobedient, He sends Samaria, the Israelites, the northern tribes to come and attack Judah, to discipline them and get them to come back to God. But they did it with a vengeance. Now, these are relatives. These are like cousins. The northern tribes are Israelites and Israel and Judah is the southern tribes and they're Israelites, so they're cousins. The northern cousins said,

"You know what? We're just going to wipe the southern cousins out." They attacked them with a vengeance, with a hatred, and took their women and their sons and their children and made them into slaves and took all the wealth away from them, leaving them desolate. But a prophet of God says, "Um, this is not right. God sent you to attack Judah to try and bring them back to Him. He did not send you there to decimate them." So they let everybody go eventually. They bound up the sick and the wounded with oil and wine, and they put the feeble on donkeys and they sent them to Jerusalem.

Does this sound vaguely familiar? It sounds like the parable. This is what Jesus had in mind. He had in mind for them to think of this. But when they think of this, they think, "Oh, Samaritans, they were so evil. They took 200,000 people captive. What awful people are they." He was winding them up a little bit, that's what Jesus was doing, but He was doing it for a purpose. He wanted us to understand who we are in the story. We like to think we're the Good Samaritan, and we always praise the Good Samaritan and make them the hero. The reality is, if we admit it, we're the guys that are trying to figure out how little we can do in order to get through and get by. When it comes right down to it, none of us follow the law. That's what Galatians was talking about. The law was not there to save us. If the law could bring life, then it would contradict the Gospel, but it doesn't. The only thing the law does is kill us. And we are guilty.

The Good Samaritan in this story, like any parable, the story is not about us and what we are called to do. What must I do? I can do nothing. That's what the parables tell us. But God has done everything for me. The Good Samaritan in this parable is not about us. It's about God who gave the promise to Abraham that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is The Good Samaritan for us. He binds up our wounds. He brings us from death into life, because we have been attacked by robbers, by sin, by Satan, by the world around us. The evil that consumes us and that kills us, that causes us to be dead in our sins and trespasses. The Good Samaritan, our Savior Jesus Christ comes and He binds up our wounds through oil and water or oil and wine, or in our case, water and wine. In the water, He baptizes us and cleanse us and heals us from our sin. In the Lord's Supper, with the body and blood of Christ, He nourishes us and heals us and gives us eternal life and saves us from our sin, from that which has robbed us, has destroyed our soul. He heals our soul with His own body and blood and with His Word. He is the Good Samaritan. He's the one that pays for our sin. He's the one that provides for our healing. What does He do? He takes the man to the inn and he gives him two denari and says, "Whatever else you need to spend, I will pay it." He has no concern for what it will cost Him because He loves us that much and He gives us all things. The promise given to Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

And all the law does is condemn us so that we might understand who has bound up our wounds and who has healed us, and that is Jesus Christ. And now that we are healed, now that our wounds have been bound up, now that Christ has saved us, now that we are in His home and we are His children now, we should seek to emulate Him and follow after Him and try to be a Good Samaritan to those around us. But unlike the headlines of the Good Samaritans out there, it's not about us getting the praise. It's about us serving God and giving Him the glory. I'm only doing this because of my Savior Jesus Christ who loves me and loves you. It's not about me, it's about God working in me and through me for your benefit and for mine. Because we are healed by the Good Samaritan who has met us on the way, bound up our wounds, and restored us to true everlasting life. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.