

Sermon for Trinity 13 – Luke 10:23-37

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan is one of, if not the most famous parable of Sacred Scripture. Being a "Good Samaritan" is a phrase used even in our everyday culture. Good Samaritan laws protect common people who assist strangers in dire need. But when we look at the actual story itself of the Good Samaritan, we see what Christ has to teach us: what truly good works are according to God's commandments and, chiefly, the picture of the Kingdom of God—Christ preaching, healing, and forgiving us.

This parable starts with a question from a lawyer, a teacher of the law, who is a supposed expert in God's commands. But his question is a nonsensical one: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This question is illogical for one main reason: no one can *do* anything to inherit eternal life. Being an heir, having an inheritance has little to do with doing and earning. Inheriting is founded not on doing, but being. Whether it's farming acreage, thousands of dollars, an old boat, or eternal life, inheriting is about who you are, not what you've done. And that last one, eternal life, comes as a free gift to us received in Holy Baptism and completed in death. We are united with Christ. We are grafted into God's family tree.

But this truth has eluded the teacher of the law who stands before Christ. He knows works righteousness and faultfinding in others, but nothing about God's grace in the sin-forgiving office of Christ. In other words, "Teach the people, O Christ, to do something by which they may be saved."

And yet, our Lord does indulge the question on the lawyer's terms. "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" If you want to go to the Scriptures and law, let's go. What do the commandments expect of you? Has your heart been fully devoted to God? Have you loved your neighbor perfectly? The teacher of the law knows this to be true. Christ commends him for answering correctly. Excellent! Bravo! You have spoken written, and know the Law. However, one thing you lack. Then comes the thunderous condemnation: "Do this!" Those two little words bring every person to their knees: "Do this!" You know the law, but that's not enough: "Do this!" The law must be kept and done and whatever remains undone on your account will not be life, but eternal death. Moses, who received the law could not himself stand before God's "Do this!" and live. The great prophet Isaiah confessed himself to be unclean in God's holy presence. Jeremiah, Daniel, David, Peter, and Paul—all were powerless before God's "Do This!" In the face of the law, we see our weakness and failure, and also that eternal life must come by some other means.

The highest wisdom and knowledge of the law of which we can never fulfill and finish in this life is no more than this: God's Son came down from heaven, shed His blood, and gives us the forgiveness of sins for eternal life. The "Do this" finds its "Done" in Christ Jesus. In the life to come, we will always and eternally have it before our eyes and hearts to live according to it.

But this is not where the conversation ended for Christ and the lawyer. At least, not yet. The teacher of the law asks Christ, "Who is my neighbor?" It's the question we like to ask, too. For we like to distinguish our neighbors according to our opinions of them. We like to regard as neighbors

only those we like. Friends. Well-deserving folks. People who we deem worthy of our effort, kindness, and love. People whom we benefit from. People whom we hope to benefit from. But any person who's unknown, unworthy, or unthankful, well, they're not my neighbor.

Against our hypocrisy Christ answers with a story about a poor, wounded man who fell among murderers and was left half dead. Only a Samaritan stops, serves him, and helps him after a priest and Levite pass by. The priest and Levite were neighbors in name only. The Samaritan was by works and deeds, which is really the only kind of neighbor. These actions and the fact that they were received by the injured man bind these neighbors together.

In the same way, Christ shows that He Himself is the neighbor who completely fulfills the commandments and demonstrates His love to us poor, miserable sinners, wounded as we are and dying before God's "Do this!" In this Samaritan, Christ portrays and shows the kindness, help, and comfort that He freely gives to us. "Do this!" leaves us in our sins against God's commandments, under God's wrath, and dying eternal death. Yet now we are rescued by Him, so that we receive God's grace, comfort, and life for our conscience, and even begin to keep the law. Since we know and believe the unfathomable love of Christ, this love flows out to our neighbors in need. We can take Christ's interest in the needs of forsaken, hopeless, and helpless people. We know that what we do for them, we have done for Christ.

Our chief teaching as Christians is that we cannot help ourselves, neither can any works or teachings of the law. Yet Christ begins it with us. He pities us, comforts us, and is our Friend. He binds up our wounds. He puts us on His animal. He cares for our every need. He heals us. Our sins are forgiven. We are free.

Christ takes us to the inn to be cared for. He takes us to the church service. He tells her what to do and to carry out, because He has paid the whole cost. Here our hearts are lifted up to Christ in faith; here the law itself does not satisfy; here we take comfort that He fulfills it and imparts the blessings to us. So Christ remains our righteousness, redemption, and holiness.

Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. Blessed are the ears which hear what you hear. God grant that with Simeon we give up our life with all joy. God grant that with Mary we praise God for giving us a Son. God grant that with David we rejoice in Him who has given us a house and eternal kingdom established in the Body of Christ.

Seeing and hearing are very important. Light and sound give revelation. When the sun rises, it completely fills the world with light. During the day, no one usually pays attention to the moon and stars that were reflecting the sun's light during the night. So also, when a bell or siren resounds through the air outside, one cannot hear what is spoken, sung, or called out. When our Savior, our Good Samaritan, is at the center, every other comfort, righteousness, and salvation disappear. Of Him, we can never hear and see enough. His preaching, teaching, and singing will endure until the day when we see them fully revealed at the return of Christ in His Eternal Day. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✨BJF✨