

Pastor T.C. Arnold
13th Sunday after Trinity
August 21st, 2016
Luke 10:25-37

And behold, one day at a congregational voters assemble at Christ Lutheran Church a man of significance and stature in the community stood up and asked the congregational president who was chairing the meeting, to put him to the test, “what must I do to become a member of Christ Lutheran Church?” To that the president responds, “What does it say in the constitution and bylaws? How do you read it? And he answered, “Those who shall desire to become communicant members shall be required to make application to the Pastor and Elders’ Committee.” “You have answered correctly,” said the president, “do this and you will become a member.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to the president, “and who is a member of this parish-family?” The president replied, “a man was going down from Platte City to Platte Woods when he fell among some non-Christian missionaries. They told him that in order to find favor with God, that he must work toward becoming a righteous man by good works. Only then would he be loved by God and accepted into His kingdom. They left the man on a park-bench with all sorts of confusing literature to read. The pastor from Christ Lutheran came walking by and saw the man in great distress, hands on his head with the false teaching literature at his side. The pastor quickly walked by on the other side. An elder from Christ Lutheran came along the way and seeing the literature and confused man quickly walked by on the other side.

Then, at that time, another member of Christ Lutheran who had not been to church in more than a year came by and helped the man to see what the Bible says, to confess the faith given by Jesus in the Gospel, bound up the wounds of a broken heart, and told him, that if he needs anything else to call him. In the meantime, he would be praying for the confused man. So, the president of the congregation asked, “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be the member of Christ Lutheran Church?” “The man said, the one who showed him mercy,” said the prominent man. And the president said, “You go, and do likewise.” But now to add to this... there is more. The pastor and the elder were members too – but didn’t show to be so. But like the delinquent member, all three are poor miserable sinner-members of the same parish-family.

Perhaps this silly rendition of the Good Samaritan, in our minds, would not likely happen in our day and age. But perhaps even more of a far-fetched tale was this story that Jesus told here in Luke chapter 10. Why would a priest and Levite pass by without helping the “half-dead” neighbor? Why would, of all people, a Samaritan, help this Jewish man, whose people held the upmost contempt for the Samaritans, by risking his own life, helping him with all that he had, and telling the innkeeper that if more is needed, he would provide? Why would the Samaritan be “the hero?”

You see, the answer is simple. There is only one man in the story told by Jesus – and the silly story I told – who is the hero. In both cases, the one who helped the men in distress was Jesus. That’s right, Jesus was the Samaritan in the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus was the delinquent member in my “made-up” rendition. You see, we often times miss the point of the story. We think we are to be the Good Samaritan and we are to be the member who has not been to church for a long time. Yes indeed, we are to act the way these men acted in these stories... but they are not you. In both cases, that’s Jesus. And you are the one laying half dead on the side of the road – so close to death – so dead – that you need Jesus who, is looked down upon, who is not considered the kind of righteous king they had hoped for, who was too humble to be

the Lord, to come and bind the wounds... to give all that He has... to give more than we will ever need to make us whole again. The same with the man we thought is not righteous because he doesn't come to church. God even works through him... he even speaks through nominal Christians... when God chooses to do so. So, don't disparage... don't look down upon... do begrudge God's precious children.

At the same time, let's be clear. I'm not saying... become a delinquent member of Christ Lutheran. Remember, you are not that member, Jesus typifies that member because of the way we will look down upon that person. Rather, instead, encourage that person to be in the midst of God's saving gifts more often. Encourage, do not disparage and do not belittle. For Jesus said once, "*the one who is without sin, may cast the first stone.*" And indeed there is not one of us without sin. And while we might think of ourselves as "more righteous" than others, you indeed, along with me, are chief of all sinners.

None of us want to be the beaten, half-dead man on the side of the road. None of us want to be the one on the park bench, confused, dismayed, troubled... No, we want to have it all put together. We want to have it all sorted out. We want to have good health and no threats of bodily harm from anyone. The potential of any of this scares us to death and we want protection. We would do anything and everything to protect ourselves from the robbers who would do bodily harm to you and your family. No doubt. I say also, do everything you can to protect yourself from devil and his evil schemes. He sends wolves in sheep's clothing to mislead us into believing that we don't need this...that we are better off as individuals rather than a faith community to help and support each other... that we can be lone rangers in faith and life, fending off the evil one's poisonous darts. Don't take that chance, beloved in the Lord. Don't go down that devilish/all too tempting road for the sake of yourself or your children.

But here's the point of the parable in Luke 10. You, lying their half-dead on the side of the road... beaten, bleeding, dying... you are there alone. By yourself, without the Samaritan, we fall into the hands of evil men. By yourself, without protection, we are left vulnerable. And it wasn't until Jesus came along to bind wounds, to carry you to the place of rest and healing, to pay for all the care you need until full health is restored, did you realize that this journey on the road called life is never a solo journey. We need another. We need an unlikely hero.

And so it is the lowly Samaritan or the "not-so" regular member in our stories who act as Christ in the midst of the suffering and confused. Yes, be the unlikely hero. But here's the point... you already have one. His name is Jesus and He comes to you.

School started again for our kids this past week and the week before. Ben went off for his sophomore year and we took Jacob to college on Friday. We pray for the protection of our children who go so far away. We pray they are "kept" and "held" in the Lord's protective hands. And they are. They are not alone. So we teach our children as we too need to hear this refrain... "*Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.*" And we can day together, "***The Lord is my helper, I will not fear, what can man do to me?***" (say it with me).

It is true, man can harm and confuse. But thanks be to God – we have a present Lord who binds up the brokenhearted – who remains by our side in difficult times – who forgives our sins even though we don't deserve it – who died for you and me because of this one simple reason. He loves us more than we could ever comprehend. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.