

## Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, A✠D, 2008

**Luke 10:23-37** Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!"<sup>24</sup> For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."<sup>25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"<sup>27</sup> And he answered, "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."<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead."<sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side."<sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion."<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him."<sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"<sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 Two men were beaten and left for dead in the ditch. Both were on their way from Jerusalem to Jericho. One was attacked by robbers who pounced upon him by surprise. He never even saw them coming. The other man was walking with the robbers. In fact, he supposed they were his friends. Until the very moment when they turned on him and beat him to the brink of death, he thought they were very close friends. But these robbers make no friends. At best, they let you know they're your enemies. At worst, they treat you like they treated this second man, tricking you into thinking they're your friends until they beat you to death.

2 Even from the ditch of death, the second man refused to acknowledge he had been beaten by robbers. Instead, he thought if he were just a bit nicer to these robbers, maybe they'd welcome him back as a friend. So this second man, the expert in the law, went to Jesus to test Him, to see if this Teacher knew as much as he did about the Law. "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Never one to bow to the tests of the Pharisees, Jesus asked the lawyer a question, "What is written in the Law?" "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." "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

3 The lawyer had summarized the Ten Commandments. Have no other gods; do not misuse the name of the Lord your God; remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. These are summarized simply: love the Lord your God with every fiber of your being. Honor your father and mother; do not murder; do not commit

adultery; do not steal; do not give false testimony against your neighbor; do not covet. In other words: love your neighbor. Jesus affirmed the lawyer's answer. Do this and you will live.

4 The unspoken corollary to "do this and live" is "don't do this and die." If every second of every day, with every part of your body, you don't love the Lord your God, you're dead. If you have one false god, even for a second, if you worship yourself for even a moment, you're dead. Do this and live. Love your neighbor as yourself. Every neighbor, all the time. If you harbor any ill feelings toward anyone, even for a second, if there's even one person you're not willing to love unconditionally, if you have even one angry thought, one lustful thought, one selfish thought, one mean word, you're dead. Do this and live. But if you don't, you die. If you fail to meet the standard Jesus set before you—be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect—you die.

5 Both men were beaten by the robbers of the Commandments and left for dead in the ditch. That's what the Law does to sinners: kills them. The lawyer asked Jesus "Who is my neighbor?" so that he could make the Law something doable. If he could limit who his neighbor was to a neat and tidy list of people, he might come just a bit closer to keeping the Law. Foolish lawyer, the Law is not your friend. It will not, it cannot, save you. No matter how determined the lawyer might be to inherit eternal life, he cannot. The priest and the Levite pass by, unable and unwilling to help. You are not the Samaritan. The story is not an exhortation to be more like the Samaritan. The story is about what the Law does to sinners. There are only two kinds of people: those who acknowledge their sin and repent and those who, like the lawyer, refuse to acknowledge sin, hoping to hide it with pious-seeming works.

6 Jesus didn't answer the lawyer's second question either: "Who is my neighbor?" or "Whom should I love?" Any Sunday school child can answer that: everyone. But Jesus asks a completely opposite question. "Which of these proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" that is "Who loved?" Like the man left for dead, like the lawyer with his false hope in the Law, like every human since Adam and Eve, like ever sinner, you need a neighbor to be merciful to you.

7 So along came the Samaritan, the Outcast. He came to this ditch where humankind was lying beaten to death by the robbers sin and the devil. He pulled the man out of the ditch and bound up his wounds. Indeed, He took the man's sickness upon Himself. He poured oil and wine on his wounds, put the man on his animal, and took him to an inn. Which of these proved to be a Neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? The One telling the parable.

8 Jesus is the One who showed mercy by taking the sickness of sin and death from humankind and taking them onto Himself. Who is your Neighbor? Jesus. He showed mercy to you. He entered the ditch and pulled you out. He let the robbers of sin, death, and the devil rob Him of His life instead of robbing you of yours. He dressed your wounds with oil and wine. He poured the oil of His Holy Baptism upon you and poured the wine of His Blood He shed for you on the cross into your mouth. He guided you into the inn of His church and appointed innkeepers to watch over you until He returns.

9 The question was foolish from the beginning. What must you do to inherit eternal life? The same thing you can do to inherit the crown of England or a controlling share of Google stock: be born into the right family. You cannot earn eternal life. You can only receive it as an inheritance. So thanks be to God that through the waters of Holy Baptism, you have been made children of God and given a claim to this holy inheritance. Because Jesus came to be your Neighbor, your Brother, the One to show you mercy, you are a child of God.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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