

Sermon Trinity 13 2020

September 6, 2020

Luke 10: 23-37

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

As you hear this lesson, what do you hear? Likely you hear these parts: **“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’ ... ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ ... ‘You go, and do likewise.’ ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ ... 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.’ ... ‘do this, and you will live.’”** If you noticed I chose all the commands from this passage, I chose what as Lutherans we call the Law. And we say that the Law is good. This is God’s Word, this is an eternal Word—heaven and earth will fall away but His Word never will. This is what God intends for us to do, it is His will. So do it.

Do that Law, love God with all of your heart, with all your soul, and with will your strength and with all your mind. Do it. Love Him entirely. Love Him with every ounce of your being, with every thought in your brain, with every ounce you can muster. And your neighbor. As much as you love yourself, doting on your wants and your desires, do that and more for your neighbor. As the Samaritan showed mercy on the road, so also show mercy. Care for those in need. That is your call, the neighbor as you see him or her around you, care for them. When you see them hungry, feed them. When you see them suffering, relieve it. When you see them downtrodden, pick them up and carry them. That is your job, those around you—as Jesus says, “by chance.” You see that’s what this tells you. This is a lesson about love and about your neighbor being those around you, not just your friends, but those God places on the path of your life. You are called to care for them. Do this and you will live.

Now, as I say that, some of you might be squirming a little bit. You might be wondering if Pastor Zickler has gone back down the roots of his childhood and is adopting some salvation by works. You might be uncomfortable with saying it like I just did. After all, it might sound like I’m pushing this idea that we have to earn our salvation by these good things. In fact, you might be thinking, “I don’t have to do this, I’m saved by grace through faith.” But let me put it this way.

In the early church there was a document called the Didache. Now *didache* is just the Greek word for teaching. And that’s what this was. It was supposedly written the

apostles—although that wasn't well confirmed, which is why it's not included in Scripture. But this Didache begins like this: *“There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, thou shalt love God who made thee; second, thy neighbour as thyself and all things whatsoever thou wouldst should not occur to thee, thou also to another do not do.”* In other words walking in God's commands are the way of life. As He has made you anew in baptism. As He has buried you, buried your sin in the death of Christ's tomb, He has washed you and made you anew in the life of Christ's resurrection. This is that life. That life shows mercy—and don't we need mercy in our day! That life shows forth mercy for our neighbor, and it shows forth love for God, love with the wholeness of heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do this and you will live. Walk in this life. Don't walk in the way of sin, in the way of death.

But as I say this, first of all notice what I haven't said. I have been saying, “do this and you will live.” But I have not said “do this SO THAT you will live.” That's the first thing. You don't do this so that you will live. You walk in the way of life that Jesus has raised you to in His resurrection. You don't pick yourself up into that life by doing these things. The second thing is what I always say. If you watch my devotions, you heard me say it about his passage this week, and I'm sure you've heard me say it before. That phrase, “do this and you will live,” is true. It's a promise, a promise spoken by our Lord, and when our Lord speaks He does not lie, so therefore this promise is a promise that holds to eternity. Do this and you will live. But what's the problem? You don't do it. You haven't done it. You won't do it. You'll try and you'll try, or at least you should keep trying. Like I said this is what God wants for you. But you won't do it. So you don't do this so that you will live.

And yet what do we see from this Lawyer that Jesus interacts with in the lesson? He wants to do this so that he can live. Look at what Luke tells us, the man **“desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”** So this man has asked Jesus how one earns eternal life. He says the Law says to love God and love neighbor, and the man wants to prove that he's right, that he's righteous. He wants to justify himself. Now the first thing I think is interesting is that the question presumes that this loving God with the entire heart, soul, mind, and strength is easy and done with no trouble. In his arrogance, there's not a question of how. “How can I love God with my heart, soul, mind, and strength?” But let's look past that, and deal with what's here. This man jumps to justifying himself by asking who is neighbor is.

I just said that the first thing that was interesting was the question, but there's a lot more that's interesting. For example, there's the fact that Jesus tells him this is the

wrong question. Look at how Jesus answers. He asks who was a neighbor to the beaten man. He makes the point that the Lawyer needs to quit wondering who is neighbor is, and he needs to be the neighbor. That's interesting, and noteworthy. It's also interesting all the ways this justification could be directed.

What do I mean? Well, first of all, Luke tells us that this Lawyer is trying to trap Jesus. He's putting Jesus, **"to the test."** So he could be trying to justify himself in the argument with Jesus. He could be trying to prove that intellectually he's got something on this teacher from Galilee. He also could be trying to justify himself before God. He could be trying to prove how good he is by saying, "look there is my neighbor, and now I am faithful and I deserve the eternal life coming to me." He could also—sort of on the flip side of that—be justifying how he knows he doesn't care for everyone. "Yes, I haven't cared for this person or that person, but I'm not by brother's keeper." These are all interesting. And in fact, I don't think they're mutually exclusive. I think they all go hand in hand.

And in that, then, we should learn from him. We should learn from Jesus' response to him. We should learn that all the ways we try to use the law, the commands, to prove how right we are will fall short. We should see what Jesus is doing. He's doing what He always does. Whenever someone asks Him, "What must I do?" Then He raises the bar.

You see, while we should do God's will according to His commands, not so that we would live, but because they are good, we can't forget what else this Law is. It's not just instruction, but it's a diagnostic tool. In fact, it's first and foremost a diagnostic tool. This command to do this comes to you, and above all it, it strikes you and says, "look you're supposed to be doing this. Look you're supposed to be loving God with 100% of your heart, with 100% of your soul, with 100% of your mind, and with 100% your strength. 100%. And you're to be loving your neighbor as yourself, 100%. Perfectly. You're not." It comes to you and it tears the bandages off of you, the bandages that have made you think that you're not as bad as it tells you. And the Law does this not only in those commands. But it also does it in the reality around us. The Law says, "don't only look at ways you're falling short, look at the world, look at coronaviruses and looting and political messes, look at all of it. Look at it and see that you need to repent. You're not doing it right so you dwell in the way of death. And you can see it because you see death is coming for you. You don't know when, you don't know how. But it will come for you"

I liken it to the phone call I got when I was on vacation a couple of years ago. My dad had been taken to the hospital for pain, and the doctors did the diagnostic scan. They came to him and told him, “there is cancer, and it’s metastasized.” This was a death sentence. And the Law comes as that same diagnostic, we have a death sentence by sin.

Now, as I’m saying this, you might be saying, “Wow Pastor, this is really beating us up!” I’m not trying to. I’m only trying to show you the reality of your sin and the commands. But this isn’t just to be mean. No. It’s so that you can relate not to the Lawyer in the story, nor the Levite or priest in the parable. No, it’s so you can relate to the man beaten and left half-dead. Why? Because then you can see the beauty of this story. It’s not just a parable telling you what to do. No, it’s something so much greater. It’s the story of Jesus. You have been beaten down by sin, by death, by suffering, by the devil Himself. And yet Jesus is your Good Samaritan. He is the One who, when you see your estate, He picks you up and puts you on His animal. He bears your load, bears the load of your sin on the cross, suffering death that you would have life in His resurrection. He walks the path, carrying you when you are suffering. He carries you to the inn of His church, where He can wash your wounded body and soul with the oil of the waters of baptism, the salve of His mercy to you. He tends to you and feeds you His body, with the wine of His blood bringing you the remedy that will be your medicine of immortality.

You see it sounds like I am saying all of these hard things to hear, but I am merely bringing you the diagnosis, so that you would know the treatment. Doctors sometimes have to play the bad guys as they bear bad news, but the joy we have is that our physician has the eternal vaccine for our virus. You see as worried as we are about viruses and vaccines right now, the real virus is sin, and the real antibodies are in the blood of Christ.

So Christians, as you hear this Law, this command in this passage, do it, know that it is right and good for you to do what God commands. Do it not so that you would live, but do it and live. Live in the life of your Good Samaritan Jesus. Do it because He has been so merciful to you that you could never hope to repay Him. Do it because He has picked up your half-dead body from the road of sin, and has carried you to the hospital of His Church with His Word and Sacraments to treat your illness—because that is what the Church is: a hospital for the sick. But our Great Physician, our Good Samaritan is the most merciful and gracious Physician there is. Amen.