

Sermon Trinity 13 2021

August 29, 2021

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 upon the Gospel Lesson, the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The interaction between Jesus and the Lawyer in this story is a good reminder of something when it comes to our interactions with God: when we ask a law question, we get a law answer. Or maybe more broadly as we relate to God as we could say it this way: “When we come to God by way of the Law, we get Law, but when we come to Him seeking mercy, we see His heart in Jesus.” But what do I mean by that? What do I mean by a Law question, what do I mean by coming to God by way of the Law? Well, look at the lawyer in the story. What question does he ask Jesus? He says, **“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”** Now, we have to acknowledge that a part of this story is making the point that this lawyer is trying to trip Jesus up. It says it right there, he stood up to put Jesus **“to the test.”** But even still, Jesus asks the man what he thinks, and so we see the approach. Jesus says, **“What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”**

Now, if I could take a second and explain that before I go on, when Jesus asks him what is written in the Law, He’s asking what is written in the first five books of the Bible, in the books of Moses—what we call Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and what’s called by Jews the “Torah”. He’s saying, “What does the Torah tell you that you have to do?” And what does he say? **“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.”**

Now, as we hear that, we hear that the man is thinking according to the Law. We see that he’s asking a law question. And by that I don’t mean the Torah as the collection of books, I mean law as command. He’s saying that to earn heaven I am to love God and love my neighbor. Now, to connect that to the Ten Commandments, hopefully you’ve heard me make the point *ad nauseum* that these two commands to love God and love neighbor connect very directly to the Ten Commandments. But just as a refresher, you can see it in that the first three commandments to have no other gods, to not misuse the Name of God, to Remember the Sabbath and make it holy, those tell you how to love God. And the remaining seven, honoring parents and authorities, not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not bearing false witness, not coveting, those tell you how to love your neighbor. And as the man says that this is how he reads the law, loving God and loving neighbor, Jesus reference Leviticus 18:5 and says, “yes, **do this and you will live.**”

He’s saying, “Yes, love God with 100% of you heart, with 100% of your soul, with 100% of your mind, and with 100% of your strength, and love your neighbor with 100%

of the love that you have for yourself, yes do that. Do that and you will live.” To connect this to what I said, if you ask a law question, you will get a law answer. If you ask what you have to do, if you ask what command you have to keep, you will get command. If you ask how you can relate to God according to the Law you’ll get the answer of the Law. And hopefully, you know where I’m going next. What’s the problem? You can’t. Do this and you will live. But you can’t do it.

Of course, I think you all know that, that’s why you’re here. You have that tug on you that tells you that you haven’t lived up to that. Sure, we like to think pretty highly of ourselves, but when we are really pushed there’s something that engages—something we often rightly call our conscience—and it says, “you haven’t done it. You haven’t done that 100%. You tried pretty hard, but you didn’t get that 100%.” Of course, the other voice comes in after that, though doesn’t it? You know the voice I’m talking about? It’s that voice that says, “well, yeah, but you couldn’t. You couldn’t do that. You’re only human. Surely God won’t demand that much.”

Or maybe it’s not that voice as much as it’s the voice that says, “Well, you haven’t done that 100% but look at so and so. Look at the horrible people out there. Look at how bad they are. Look at the people. At least I’m not like them. At least I’m not some serial killer, I’m not John Wayne Gacy, or one of those people who has killed other in mass shootings. At least I’m not a serial adulterer, or a kleptomaniac. What’s wrong with them?!” Or perhaps more convicting “At least I’m not so and so who hasn’t been vaccinated! OR like all those sheep who did get vaccinated! At least I’m not one of the sheep who feels like I have to wear a mask! OR like all of those selfish people who refuse to wear a mask!” The draw to justify ourselves is always there isn’t it? We see it in Adam and Eve and we find it in ourselves too.

And this lawyer had it as well. That’s why he came with the law question, he came wanting to know how to get to heaven by what he did. And so, Jesus gave him a law answer with the 100%’s. But that wasn’t enough. This lawyer had to prove that he had it right, so he pushed that much more. **“And who is my neighbor?”** And look at how Jesus answers here. It’s so interesting, isn’t it? It’s telling, isn’t it? Look at what He does. Does He actually tell Him who is neighbor is? He doesn’t, does He? No, He tells the story of the Good Samaritan, of this man who sacrifices to care for this person he doesn’t know from Adam. And then what does He say? He says, “and who was the neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” Obviously, the point was that the neighbor was the man who cared, who showed mercy, who sacrificed. And so Jesus says, **“Go do likewise.”** That law that you obviously think you’re keeping, let me prove to you that you’re not. You want to earn your way to heaven, you want to get to God by the Law, here it is. Go and find the man on the street whom you don’t know, pick him up, take him to the hospital, care for him, and pay for his bill. You do it out of your pocket.

As I reflect on this, I always think about it in conjunction to the rich young man who asks the same thing, but whom Jesus tells to sell all he has and give it to the poor. That man goes away sad, because he finally gets it. I wonder if this lawyer went away getting it too. I wonder if he got what Paul said in the Epistle Lesson, **“the Law was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.”** The Law, the Commands were given because of transgression, they were given that you would know your sin and that you can't get to heaven by earning your way there. If you ask that law question, you get a law answer.

But hopefully you recall I said, more than that at the beginning. I also said, “but when we come to Him seeking mercy, we see His heart in Jesus.” Or to continue looking at what Paul said in the Epistle lesson, **“The Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”** Yes the Law says do this and you will live, but you can't do it, and so God gave Christ so that heaven might be given to those who believe. When we come to Him seeking mercy, we see His heart in Jesus.

Now you might wonder why I said it that way and exactly what I mean by that, “when we come to Him seeking mercy, we see His heart in Jesus.” Well, I said it that way, because when I noted how we have this connection of this lawyer and the rich young man in Mark, both of them asking what they must do, we see Jesus telling them the fullest extent of what perfection entails. But hopefully you've noticed in the Bible that there are a whole lot of places where people come to Jesus and they don't ask that question. Instead, they come with their hands empty and they say, “Lord, have mercy.” And what does Jesus do then? Does He say, “No, you have mercy.” Does He say, “Go and do likewise?” Does He tell them, “Only if you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself?” No! And why?

Because their faith in themselves is broken down. Their faith in any other answer has vanished. They aren't trusting in masks or no masks, in vaccines or no vaccines. They're on their knees before the Creator of the universe and they're pleading with Him. And they see His heart.

Now as I use that phrase, you might say, “what do I mean by that?” And that's fair, especially because when we think of the heart we think of this sort emotive, gushy thing, and we do see that. But I got that phrase from Luther, and that's not strictly how he means it. You see historically, the heart wasn't just emotional, it was the core of our being. When I say we see God's heart, it means we see the essence of who God is.

And this story gives us a glimpse of this. As much as this is a story that is a good example to us, and as much as we should hear it and heed that call to do likewise—just not in the way that we expect to earn eternal life by it—hopefully you all know that this is really a glimpse of us and Jesus. You see, we're so often tempted to think that we're the

saviors, that we're the doers, that it's all up to us, but when the Commands become clear to us, we see it's not us. No. It's our Good Samaritan.

Instead of being that Samaritan—despite how much we should try to be—we need to realize that we are the man beaten by the robbers. We have been beaten down by our own sin and rebellion against God. We are beaten down by death and all of its manifestations in loss, things like divorce, things like Covid, all of this. We are beaten down by the tyranny and insanity of the Devil. But then this Samaritan comes, Jesus. He comes and He sacrifices for us.

You know, I mentioned before the sacrifice of the Samaritan in paying the bill, and I'll come back to that in a second, but there's something that's easy to overlook in the story. The robbers who beat the man in the story could have been lurking around the corner waiting for another victim. The Samaritan didn't know that when he stopped to help the beaten man these thugs wouldn't just jump out from behind a rock and do the same thing to him. So, there was risk, in addition to the payment, to the sacrifice. Jesus did all of that for us. He knew there would be harm. He knew He would be beaten and scourged for us and for our sins. He knew that sin called for death and so to take our place He would have to suffer that death in the payment for sin and the ultimate sacrifice that it required.

And yet He did that for you. He did that because He cares for you. He did that because His heart and His essence is love for you. He did that so that by His resurrection He could send the Holy Spirit who would draw you into the inn of His Church and here He could tend to your bruises and your wounds. Here He could wash you in the salve of the waters of Baptism. Here He could give you the medicine of immortality in His body and blood in His Holy Supper. That's His heart. You see that heart in the cross, and He tells you of it in this story because of the mercy He desires. He desires it because it reflects Him.

If you come to Him asking about the Law, though, He'll tell you what to do. But when you come to Him seeking that mercy because you have broken that Law, He'll show you that mercy is His heart, is His essence. And He'll give it to you now, and into His eternal Kingdom forever. Amen.