

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity: September 11, 2022
“What Good is the Good Samaritan?”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The religion of the Law and the destructive works of death are on the hearts and minds of many today. We gather on this Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity on the 21st Anniversary of the attacks and terroristic activities known simply as September 11th. Since that time, how much time have you spent trying to prove that Mohammed was a false prophet and that Allah is a fake, non-existent god? How much energy was donated in anger and not understanding? How many actions and prayers have been done under the words of God which direct, *“You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.”*¹

How much mental energy have you used trying to convince yourself and others that Zeus did not do the things that people say he did? How many times this week have you found yourself thinking, if only the Wiccan gods and goddesses were good, then there wouldn't be pain, suffering, and inequality in the world? My guess is that many of you haven't spent one ounce of energy or even one second of your week thinking about these things.

I would also guess that your week was probably thinking more about the same fruits of evil and death that are brought about by these false gods. Believers and non-believers alike wonder why there is evil, pain, and suffering in this world. They get angry over sin. They are broken with their own sin and hurt by the sin of others.

¹ Ephesians 4:17–27

They wrestle and struggle with how to live with mercy and grace in a sin-filled, corrupted world with sin-filled corrupted people.

These are important questions. They are central to how we live and move and have our being; however, there is one question that is even more central. One more question that serves as the foundation for the other questions, and really shapes how we then live, and move, and have our being. The lawyer asks this foundational question, “***Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?***”²

This is a question that is of extreme importance. We don’t ask important questions of fake deities. Christians don’t waste energy challenging claims of false gods. We only ask the most important questions of the true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is the God Christians seek, and He is the God that non-believers try to refute. He is the only God, and non-believers betray this fact (even if they’re not cognizant of it) when they try to refute Him (because they acknowledge, by even asking the question, that He has answers).

The New Testament writers recorded for us many times when the Pharisees, the Scribes, and even the Priests challenged Jesus on His preaching and teaching about His Father and the kingdom of heaven. They challenged Him, because their eyes and ears told them that what He was saying about Himself and His Father were true. If Jesus’ life, works, and teachings didn’t have the truth, they would not have wasted their time questioning Him.

What Jesus said about the Old Testament, about the Messiah, about God’s promise and His keeping of it, were all true. They knew it, but they didn’t want to admit it. It was clear that His words and actions were consistent with what they knew of the Messiah from the Old Testament. This is precisely why they questioned Him. They wanted to try to appease their consciences and remain in their sin.

If they could somehow prove Him wrong, they could feel better about continuing in their own sin. They were angry and aimed it at His perfect life. If they could cut Him down, and beat Him into a mangled mess, they could walk by with self-pride and an outward cleanness to the world on the other side of the road. They could look with pity, or scoff, as they passed by wagging their head, “Oh what a fool. Let Him save Himself if He is the Son of God. Look at Him, not even God wants Him.”

² Luke 10:25

They attacked His person and His works trying to prove Him wrong, and they failed miserably every time. They failed because Jesus constantly pointed them back to the Bible, which they knew. They were always accused by their false belief, but most of them refused to be humbled, turn, and repent. A few did, of course. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are but two of them; and they are not the only two. More would repent and believe after Jesus died and was raised from the dead.

The context of the Good Samaritan text is important to understand it. Without the context it can easily be twisted to confuse Law and Gospel; that is, it is easy to take this text for Christians as a way to comfort themselves that somehow our works for those in need are saving works. The sinful nature likes to stress what I can do and then turn to God, “Hey dad. Look at all of these things that I have done. I helped my poor, hurting brother. Now I must get a reward. I deserve it.”

In our text today, Jesus begins by telling His disciples “***Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴ 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.***”³ The saints in the Old Testament desired to see the fulfillment of God’s promise in Jesus Christ and did not see it. They believed it was coming and trusted in God to keep His Word. The people of Jesus’ day saw it with their own eyes, but only the disciples were blessed, because they alone believed. In order to demonstrate why they were blessed, Matthew records Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.

After these words to the disciples, a certain lawyer came forward to test Jesus. This wasn’t the kind of lawyer that we think of in our society where lawsuits and court news abound. This wasn’t a traffic lawyer, a family lawyer, or big business lawyer. This was a man who was employed by the church to read and make judgments on *church* law. We could better understand this man to be a theologian. This was a man who made his living studying the Old Testament. He knew the Bible inside and out. He knew the words and he was aware of every contemporary interpretation of it for his day. So, when this man comes to Jesus to “test” Him, he is starting a theological debate to try to show that Jesus was at odds with the doctrines of the church. He wants to try and poke holes in Jesus’ theology.

³ Luke 10:23–24

It may be too obvious to say that this man did not believe in Jesus. He asked the questions from the point of view of unbelief. He wasn't looking for right and proper understanding. He wasn't asking to learn and be better. He thought he knew better and wanted to trap Jesus and prove Him wrong.

This is different than how Christians ask questions of God. Christians can question God. We do ask as true Children to our Heavenly Father. There's the difference. We are not equals with God. We are not above God demanding an explanation. Our questions come from a point of humility, repentance, and desire for the truth. We can pour out our hearts to God asking why things are the way they are, but we never put ourselves above Him as if we know better. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David all asked questions of God—tough questions—but they asked them from humility, knowing their place before the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of the world.

I have to hand it to the lawyer, he asks an important question. He wanted to know about heaven. He wanted to know about salvation. Jesus, however, knows his heart and throws the question back at him. “You tell me. What does the Old Testament, which you claim to know so well, say? It speaks of these important matters. You should already know this answer. You tell me.”

And the lawyer does. He quotes from the Old Testament, from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19. “***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.***” Basically, keep all the commandments perfectly and you will go to heaven.

The Old Testament tells you how you can inherit eternal life. The problem, of course, is sin stops you. The Lawyer is smart enough to realize that he does sin, that everyone sins, and therefore no one will go to heaven this way. So, he seeks to justify himself, and justify his sins, by seeking a point of clarification in the Law that would soothe his conscience. He pulls the political move of answering a question with a question, “Who is my neighbor?” He thinks that if he can redefine the terms, then he can interpret the Law in such a way as to keep it; thereby attempting to prove that he doesn't simply just inherit eternal life; rather, he will have earned it. He wants to continue doing what he wants to do, and saying what he wants to say, and still force God to allow him into heaven.

Jesus, the true Teacher, has more to teach. The Old Testament has more than the condemning Law. Jesus came to bring salvation. The Old Testament also preaches the Gospel. Hosea records, “*I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*”⁴ Isaiah is told, “*Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come... and save you.’*”⁵

Salvation belongs to God. He wants to show mercy. He has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. He wants all to be saved by the knowledge of the truth. So, Jesus tells the wayward Lawyer, and all of us, a parable. You know the details well, and time is running out, many of you might be getting angry with time and have already checked your watches. I directly you quickly to a couple of things. Jesus points out special groups of people that pass by without helping. The priest passes by without helping—earthly sacrifices will not save the man. The Levite, one who is a Lawyer, a theologian of the Law, cannot save the man; so, he too passes by on the other side.

The Samaritan is the only one who has compassion. He uses all of His means to save the man. “Compassion” is only used of God and Jesus in the New Testament. The Samaritan is the divine character representing Jesus. The Law and the temple Sacrifices cannot save, but God himself saves in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Believe this and you will live. Believe this and you will inherit eternal life. There is nothing else. This is the Gospel.

But God, why am I hurting so much? Why does grief seem to consume me on so many days? Why do I miss my loved ones so much? Why am I so sick? Why do I have this disease? Why do my kids do this? Why do others in the world do that? Why do I feel so bad? Why can’t I get ahold of my emotions? Why is this marriage so hard? Why do I struggle so much with church people? Why is my neighbor so difficult? Why am I separated from my loved ones? Why do I struggle with temptations so much? **Why God, why?**

Brothers and sisters, asking questions is good. You place them before the One, true God, the God who knows and controls all things, the God who can hear and answer prayer. He is the One who answers as a Dear Father to you, His dear child.

⁴ Hosea 6:6

⁵ Isaiah 35:4

And the Lord Jesus does answer. He does not leave you alone. The world, sin, death, and the devil will beat you up, leaving you for dead in the ditch. They seek your soul. They seek to destroy you by means of false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Your intellect, your good intentions, and your discipline (even generic spiritual thoughts or wishes) will all fail you and leave you in the ditch.

But Your Good Samaritan has come. He is neither generic, nor merely “spiritual.” He is a man,—the incarnate God, He is God in the flesh. He continually binds your wounds with the Holy Absolution, with the fact that you ARE Baptized. He puts you on His own dear shoulders. He binds you up today with the Holy Supper of Christ’s true body and true blood. These are the divine medicines that heal eternally. There is nothing more for you to do. Your Redeemer and Savior places you in the Church, where the inn-keeper can take care of you until He returns. You are here with all of your fellow travelers for care and for support. The Lord’s mercy is for all people. And if for ALL, then it is for you, too. Eternal life is yours. Christ is yours. What can man do? Nothing that destroys God mercy for you.

Let us pray,
 “In suff’ring be Thy love my peace,
 In weakness be Thy love my pow’r;
 And when the storms of life shall cease,
 O Jesus, in that final hour,
 Be Thou my rod and staff and guide,
 And draw me safely to Thy side!”⁶ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁶ Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me LSB 683:4

Prayer of the Church

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Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Heavenly Father, Your Son has triumphed by His cross. Give grace to Your Church to proclaim His victory throughout the world — the victory of that love which hate could not destroy and that life which death could not overcome. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, we praise You for retaining among us Your Holy Word and Sacraments. Continue to raise up faithful stewards of Your mysteries, that repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ's name would be proclaimed in our midst and throughout all the world. Prepare all Your baptized children to be faithful confessors of the hope that is in them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lover of mankind, bind our families together in perfect harmony and rule our hearts with the peace of Christ. Cause His Word to dwell richly among us, and let fathers and heads of the household teach and admonish their families in all wisdom. Let our songs, words and deeds be done in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, with thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, grant health and wisdom to those in authority, that they may carry out their duties according to Your will. Enable them to protect us from violence and evil and to maintain peace and righteousness. Let our land be filled with citizens who love You with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and who love their neighbors as themselves. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Richard, Cody, and Sophia*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Jordan and Dianna* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, You have shown us Your mercy in Your Son, Jesus Christ, who became our Good Samaritan to save us from all evil and death. Give us compassionate hearts, that we may not be blind to the needs of others but show to all Your mercy and love. We especially pray for *Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), and those we name in our hearts*. Bind up our wounds, and send us forth to bind up the wounds of others with the healing balm of Your Gospel. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

At Your invitation, O Father, we come to Your Supper for rest. Preserve us from impenitence and unbelief, cleanse us from our unrighteousness, and clothe us with the righteousness purchased with Your Son's blood. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, grant to those who mourn comfort in their grief and grace to rejoice in the reunion to come with those who have died in the faith. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

These and whatsoever other things You would have us ask of You, O God, grant us for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Lord and Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**