

Sermon Proper 10 2019

July 14, 2019

Luke 10:25-37

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: the parable of the Good Samaritan.

As we hear this old familiar parable, this morning, we learn something about human nature, don't we? After all, look at the interaction here between Jesus and this Lawyer. Why does Luke tell us that he asks this question? **"A lawyer stood up to put him to the test."** Or in other words, he's trying to trip Jesus up. He's trying to ensnare him in a trap. And why ultimately? He, **"desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"** What do we see? We see a man, an expert trying to trip Jesus up and justify himself as being right. And what does he want to be right about? Love.

This man had asked Jesus about how to get to heaven, and when Jesus turned the question on the seeker, the test on the tester, what had it come down to? Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. And so this man was trying to prove how right he was in getting to heaven this way so that he could claim his own perfection.

Can we relate in our day? How often as Christians are we challenged on what love is? We don't understand love. Love wins, love is the highest and greatest thing and we as Christians don't get it. Of course, there's something right about this. Love does win. Love is the highest and greatest thing. Love is all we need. But what is that love? How do we understand that love?

I've mentioned this before but in our day it's associated with affection. It's centered on how we feel about someone. I we feel warmly for them and in that feeling support them in everything they want to do, that's love. I was watching a show recently where two characters were discussing what the purpose of living was. The one character said it was children and continuing life, and the other said it was love. Now there was a lot of context to this conversation, and I wouldn't want to make it sound like that either was absolutely right, cut and dry. But what made it so interesting was that this character who said it was all about love had married her husband having begun an affair with him when he was still married to his wife. The show made it clear that the love toward the mistress was real to him, more real than his marriage, so he left.

Now I'm not going to say that we shouldn't feel affection for people, that we shouldn't think fondly and warmly toward them, but what does our Lord show is the essence of love? In other words, if God forbid it, but I ever cease in having warm feelings of affection toward my wife, should I just leave her? Is that what love is? All the more if I find someone with whom I share those feelings? Is that love? Look at this lesson, is that what Jesus says? No, He says it's the one **"having mercy."** It's the man who gives, who sacrifices, who shows a lack of concern for himself.

Think about the story. Look at the details of the story. **"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine."** So the first thing we see is that the Samaritan has compassion, he cares for the immediate needs of the man. Then what? **"Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him."** Then he gives up his own comfort in a willingness to provide for the man. Would it have been nice to just keep going and riding on the animal? You bet, but instead, he gets off the animal and provides for the man to have it. Then what? Then, **"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.'"** Now this is a bit hard to fathom because in our day, if we were to find someone half dead on the road, we would just call an ambulance and the ambulance would take them to a hospital and the costs would be covered by the hospital if there's no insurance company for the man, etc., etc. But that wasn't the case then. This care had to be provided by someone. So the man does it. To try to put it in context it might be like saying that you would pay the hospital bill if the man was uninsured. How would people around you respond to that? "You did what? You found a man on the side of the road and said you'd cover his hospital bill? What are you thinking?" That wouldn't go over well, would it?

But this is what this love is. This is what this mercy is. This love is self-giving. It's self-sacrificing. And it's doing so in ways that don't make sense to the world. It's doing so when it seems contrary to our own self-fulfillment and our own self-actualization. Sometimes it's even uncomfortable for us.

So Christians, you have the call to love in that way. You have the call to love the world that would like to tell you that you get love all wrong in that way. You have the call to love those that the world would see this as less than worthwhile in that way. Love those in need, love those who are unlovable, and love them in a way that is self-sacrificing and giving.

And as you're doing that understand the real point of all of this. This lawyer trying to justify himself, the voices in our day trying to justify themselves have missed it. This command doesn't allow for that self-justification, because you don't do it sufficiently. That doesn't alleviate the duty you have to your neighbor. It doesn't alleviate your call to care for them. But what it does is direct your sight to the one who has seen your estate as the beaten and broken man half-dead on the side of the road. What it does is show you just how broken you are, and that you aren't so much in a position to pick others up—sometimes you are, and that's when you need to do it—but always you need to see that you are broken by the voices of this world, broken by your sin, broken by death, and yet the Good Samaritan has come to you and carried you to the inn where you are being cared for. Or we could say the hospital. Or we could say the church.

You see the Lord Jesus has left the comfort of heaven for you. He has born your brokenness, born the cost of your sin, and He has done all of it to bring healing to you. When you get angry about all of these things, when you get worn down by all the sin in yourself in and in the world, when all of it is more than you can handle, you can see that He has found you on the side of the road and He has picked you up and brought you to safety. He has picked up your sin and carried it to the cross. Sacrificing even His life for it. And He has put the oil on your wounds of your brokenness by baptizing you, by feeding you with His body and His blood.

In fact, this love is so remarkable that it even defines us. It actually gives us worth as we are crushed by our sin, by the brokenness of this world. As a pastor I see this a lot. I see people who are so crushed by the brokenness of everything that they think they have no worth. In the midst of that I get to tell them of what Jesus has done. How He gives us worth.

As kind of an example of this, my wife and the kids and I just saw Toy Story 4, and I was struck by the thought there. You see in that movie there is a toy that's created by a little girl. The toy is made out of a plastic spork, pipe cleaner, and popsicle sticks—and if you know the movies, you know that when a toy is a toy it has life—but this one in that life thought he was trash. He in fact kept running to the trash can to throw himself away. But to the girl who created him, he was worth everything. She wanted him with her all the time, when she was awake, when she was playing, even when she was sleeping. His worth was given by the girl. That's how our Lord sees us. Our worth comes from Him. Our worth to Him is His whole life. To Him we are worth dying for.

In fact to contrast this with the self-justification I've been speaking about. The world's need and our own need to justify ourselves, I was meditating on this over the past couple of weeks and how this relates to this whole issue of self-justification. The goal of this man in the lesson was to be justified by himself. By being good enough on his own, by doing it right on his own. By figuring out who his neighbor is, he could be proven right on his own by that definition of neighbor. And as I thought about that, I was thinking about self-righteousness and going to church. I realized that not going to church is actually one of the most self-righteous things we can do. You know in our time there's all of this conversation about not wanting to be associated with organized religion, and just knowing Jesus. But that's like sitting on the side of the road and telling the Good Samaritan, "I don't need the care of the Inn, I can do it here."

Instead as Christians we come and we hear the diagnosis of our wounds, and we hear of the balm for that wound of sin. As I said, here we have the oil and ointment of Baptism, of the Lord's Supper, of the preaching of the Word. All of this addresses the reality that we need a hospital, that this is that hospital. We can't do it on our own. It's too much. We have too much need from this One who has done so much for us.

But He has done it. Just as He calls us to a self-sacrificing love over and against what the world sees, He has loved us. He has carried us. He has treated and healed us. He has proven our worth to Him. Christians, that's your worth, that's the love of our Lord for you. With that in mind don't give in to the world that would seek to direct you to a different love. Look to the love of this God and know that He is the One who calls you to love like the Good Samaritan, but know that He does this because He loves you in that love. Love that gave up all for you and to make you whole in Him. Amen.