

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity (2022)

Faith, the Way to Eternal Life

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“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”” (Luke 10:25, ESV)

The Gospel Reading for today takes place just after our Lord has completed His conversation with the seventy-two whom He had sent out to proclaim the Good News. They are rejoicing because many wonderful and blessed things happened while they were evangelizing in Christ’s name. With excitement they declare, ***“even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (Luke 10:17, ESV)*** Not only nature, but the spiritual forces of evil are subject to Christ. Jesus, hearing this good news rejoices in the Holy Spirit, thanking God, the Lord of heaven and earth, that what these disciples have been given to know has been hidden from the wise and understanding. It has been revealed to these few who have been chosen by Jesus, those whom He has made His own. Thus, there is an ownership component in these words. Christ has chosen them personally, He has blessed them, and sent them out, into the world to be His ambassadors, to proclaim His Word to others that they, too, may become His. So He tells them, ***“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! 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.” (Luke 10:23–24, ESV)*** Blessed indeed are these few, for they have been chosen out of the world to see, to hear, and to understand, through faith, the revelation of God in Christ Jesus.

While having this conversation with His disciples, it becomes obvious that Jesus and His disciples are not alone, there are others present. One of those present is a lawyer, one educated in the Law of the Torah. He hears what Jesus has said to His disciples and he thinks to himself, “Wait a minute! Am I not as blessed as they are? Have I not been given eyes to see and ears to hear? Do I not understand the Torah? Do I not have eternal life? Sure, I do!” Now upset by what he has heard, he stands up, putting Jesus to the test, saying, ***“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25, ESV)***

Is this not the question of many? We remember the rich man asking Jesus, ***“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 18:18; Mark 10:15, ESV)*** In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus tells the crowd not to ***“work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life,”*** and the crowd responds, ***“What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” and Jesus answers, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (John 6:27–29, ESV)*** And the crowd who heard St. Peter and the other apostles preach at Jerusalem, concerned for their eternal souls, asked, ***“Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37, ESV)*** In each case the questioners are given the correct answer, but, as we shall see, not all perceive the answer correctly.

In the case of this lawyer, our Lord answers his question by asking a question, ***“What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26, ESV)*** and the lawyer responds, saying, ***“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.” (Luke 10:27, ESV)*** The lawyer, showing his mastery of the Torah, the Law, answers by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5, although he adds to it, ***“with all your mind.”*** and then he quotes from Leviticus 19:18, ***“you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”***

Our Lord says to the lawyer, ***“You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” (Luke 10:28, ESV)*** Fulfill the Law and you will live! Yes, this lawyer knew what the Law said, but from what follows we can see he didn’t know how to apply it to himself.

Ruffled by what Jesus has said and desiring to declare his own righteousness, he challenges Jesus, asking ***“And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29, ESV)*** This pompous, self-righteous, and arrogant man has convinced himself that he fully understands the Torah. He firmly believes that his soul is secure because he is fulfilling the Law everyday by loving God and those neighbors he knows, he is observing all the temple laws, praying at the requisite time every day, while maintaining his cleanliness by avoiding everything which the Law says will make him unclean, especially those unclean neighbors, those Samaritans. However, in asking Jesus, ***“who is my neighbor?”*** he has conveniently forgotten what the Law said about the stranger among you. The Law of God says, ***“You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:34, ESV)***

Immediately Jesus can see that this lawyer doesn’t really know the Law, so He decides to teach him by telling him a parable about a man who was traveling and was set upon by thieves who robbed him, beat him, stripped him naked, and left him beside the road grievously wounded and on the verge of death.

Not long after a priest was going down the road and comes across the grievously wounded victim. This is a man of the holy ministry, a priest of the temple, surely, he will have compassion on this poor fellow and immediately come to his aid. But, no, he doesn’t do that. Instead, in a conscious attempt to avoid the man, he crosses the road and passes by on the other side, refusing to render aid. Soon, a Levite, a man connected to the priesthood, a man whose calling is to be a servant of the temple, a servant of God, he also came to the place and sees the wounded victim. Surely, he will come to the man’s aid, but, no, lo and behold, like the priest, he too crosses the road and passes by on the other side. Two men of God, two men of the temple, two men who are considered children of God’s holy people see this poor, wretched fellow, drenched in blood, probably unconscious, lying helpless and defenseless on the side of the road, yet they fail to help him. Obviously, they did not consider him their neighbor.

But as God would have it, a Samaritan, a hated neighbor of the Jews, who was journeying to another place comes upon the victim. Unlike the other “holy” men, he does not ignore the victim. Instead of crossing the road and passing by, he immediately comes to the aid of this poor man. Having compassion on him he binds his wounds, cleansing them with oil and wine, puts him on his own animal and brings him to an inn where he can care for him. The next day he pays the innkeeper two denarii to continue the man’s care and tells the innkeeper whatever else you must spend while the man mends, I will return and repay you for your effort. Wow!

As we listen to this parable most of us put ourselves in the place of the Samaritan. Surely, we would render aid to anyone we find in need. But the truth is usually something far more different. More times than not we’re the priest or the Levite, ignoring the one in need.

This parable reminds me of a situation a pastoral friend told me he once found himself in. It was early in his ministry and he along with another pastor were being visited by one of their beloved professors from the seminary. It was decided that they would all have dinner together. The town they were in was known for its wonderful restaurants, so they set off. As they begin to walk into the restaurant they were confronted by a homeless panhandler. My friend, who was used to being confronted by these dirty, unshaved, and ragged individuals was about to tell the man to get lost. But before he could say anything, the professor struck up a conversation with the

man. After introductions and some small talk, the professor invited the man to have dinner with the three of them. Taking the man into the restaurant and sitting together at table, the professor told the man to order anything from the menu he wanted, the meal was on the professor. When they finished with their dinner, the professor in a loving, parting gesture, gave the homeless man a generous sum of money and sent him on his way.

My friend told me this incident has stuck with him to this day. He had so conditioned himself to ignore men like this in the past, that it was no problem to ignore this one too. He wanted to treat him as he treated all the others, dismissively. Yet, the response of the professor shamed him, making him see himself as one who thought he was above others, that he was too important, too holy, to pious to be bothered with the likes of these. The event humbled him and in repentance he asked God to forgive him, to change him, to lead him to truly love his neighbor. So today, whenever he encounters such individuals, he does not ignore them, but rather he does all he can to assist them, to help them, to treat them with dignity and love. These poor, dirty, and ragged people are also God's creatures; creatures whom God loves. He was once the priest, or the Levite, but God showed him, through the loving action of this beloved professor that he should always be the Samaritan.

This is the purpose of our Lord's parable, to show the lawyer that he, too, should be like the Samaritan, a true neighbor to all.

Having told the parable, Jesus asks the lawyer, ***"Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"*** and the lawyer answered, ***"The one who showed him mercy."*** And Jesus said to him, ***"You go, and do likewise."*** (Luke 10:36, 37, ESV)

The lawyer had asked, ***"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*** and Jesus tells him, eternal life is not a matter of man's effort of fulfilling the Law, this is an impossibility for man. Doing the Law flows only from having received God's mercy. The legalist will make no progress towards eternal life until they recognize that they are the half-dead man lying on the side of the road and that it is Jesus who comes along and rescues them, nourishes them back to spiritual health by pouring out His mercy, His forgiveness on them. As I live, declares Jesus, you will have life and you will do mercy, not motivated by the Law, but by my love.

I can imagine the lawyer went away humbled and ashamed as did my pastor friend. The lawyer, at first, says to Jesus, "I will love my neighbor if you tell me who he is." But Jesus tells him "It is beyond your capacity to love your neighbor, because you are dead in your trespasses and sins. You need someone to show you what true love is, what true mercy is, you need someone to heal you, to give you lodging and revive you, because it is you who are the victim lying on the side of the road naked and half dead. Satan has attacked you, he has grievously wounded you by sin, and he has left you in the ditch of corruption, to await death. But I am the One who associates with sinners, who associates with you even though you don't believe your one. I am the only One who can fulfill the Law. I am the One who embodies the Torah. I am the One who brings God's mercy to the wounded and dying such as you. I am your neighbor who will never ignore you, who will come to you and give you the gifts of My mercy, My healing, who will give you life and make you My own. I will do all this not motivated by the Law and its definitions from the Torah but rather motivated by My love, that love which I will put in your heart so you may be merciful to others, to your neighbor and to all mankind."

The Good Samaritan proved to be a true neighbor to the man who fell among robbers. So, too, our Lord Jesus is our Good Samaritan, yesterday, today, and forever, loving His neighbor, loving us, rescuing us who have wandered off the beaten path, who became prey to the attacks of Satan.

He restores us to life through the power of the Gospel and the gift of faith, healing us from the wounds of sin, rescuing us that we may be members of His faithful Remnant who wait for the Last Day. Therefore, we give thanks for His gift of *Faith*, that blessed gift of healing which lifts us from the way of corruption and leads us to the *Way to Eternal Life*. Thank You God that we have such a Good Samaritan in Christ Jesus. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.