

“Who is the Good Samaritan?”

Luke 10:25-37

Sometimes we hear a story so often, we forget what it is really about. That is certainly the case with Jesus telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. Everyone knows, or thinks they know, the story. Nursing homes are named for the character in this parable. Even your most crass secular anti-church atheist knows about this story and I would imagine that most of them would not be critical of the perceived hero in our Gospel reading, because they think the hero of the story is the Good Samaritan and that it is a story about needing to be nice to people who are different from you.

Who is the hero in our Gospel reading? Even without me giving it away, I guarantee you that every preschool and kindergarten Sunday school student would get the answer right. Who is the hero in the Gospel reading? Jesus!

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. The Transfiguration of our Lord has already occurred. We are days away from Palm Sunday. Jesus has been preaching and teaching for three years. Jesus has announced in no uncertain terms that more than a few “teachers of the Law” (particularly in Jerusalem) want to figure out a way to kill Him.

From the beginning of His ministry, He was announced by John the Baptist to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. When we look at His three years of ministry, we tend to focus our attention on the miracles – because they are spectacular. Those are the “WOW” moments. They got the attention of the disciples also.

However, when you dig deep, the message is always about the forgiveness of sins. In Matthew 9, some people brought a paralytic to Jesus and “when Jesus saw their faith,” he says to him, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” And the “teachers of the Law” Harrumph! “This man is blaspheming. Only God can forgive sins.” And Jesus says, “Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or say ‘Rise and walk’? “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” He says, “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

The teacher of the Law in our Gospel reading was not interested in the forgiveness of sins. He wanted to know what He needed to do to be the hero of his story. More than that, he wants public verification that he is already the hero of his story. Look at the question that he asks, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

There are many snarky or sarcastic responses which Jesus could have made which would have really taken the wind out of his sails. But Jesus does something far more devastating to his sense of righteousness acquired through the Law. He allows the Word of God, the Torah, the Law to provide the crushing blow.

“What is written in the Law?” How do you read it?” The man answers correctly, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus says, “You are correct. Do this and you will live.”

The teacher of the Law understands full well what just happened. He got the answer right, and immediately seeks to backtrack, even though the very Word of God is right there before him. As Pastor Jonathan Fisk likes to say, “What do we do boys and girls when we come to a passage of the Bible that we don’t like? We make it go away.”

And by “making it go away,” I’m not talking about the Deist approach and, like Thomas Jefferson did, literally taking scissors and cutting out the

passages he didn't like or didn't think were authentic. I'm talking about doing what the teacher of the Law in our Gospel reading does. He tries to soften the Law by building a loophole to salve his conscience. Luke even calls him out. Desiring to justify himself, he asks, "Who is my neighbor?"

I love my neighbors. The three couples we share a driveway with are fantastic. The retired guy who hosts the condo association Christmas party every year refers to Malinda and I as "young kids." Oh wait!! I don't think that is the point that Jesus is making. He is talking about every single solitary person – including those who may or may not have the basic needs of life or even a friend in the world to speak to.

He is talking about everyone, even the heroin addicts or meth addicts. Have you ever driven past a person with car trouble and said, "I'm sure they have a cell phone."? Have you ever driven past a hitchhiker and not picked them up? I assure you that I am not going to tell my wife or daughters to stop for broken down cars or pick up hitchhikers. Do you know why? Because I am a sinful, selfish man, and I am jealous for the safety of my family over and above the needs of others.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is not simply Jesus attempting to persuade His hearers to do more for the less fortunate – not that God is unconcerned for the less fortunate. Jesus does conclude by saying, "Go and do likewise." And look at our Old Testament reading. God put in His Law that the people had to leave some of the crops unharvested so that the poor and the sojourner would have food. Israel's treatment of widows and orphans was very high on God's list. Read the Old Testament prophets.

However, again, the parable of the Good Samaritan is not mainly dealing with Jesus attempting to persuade His hearers to do more for the less fortunate. That is not what it's about. It is told as a way of showing, even the most "righteous" among us just how far away we are from our

works making us righteous in God's sight. I am a sinful, selfish man. Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." And I see how much I fail.

In the parable, who is the Good Samaritan? It is not me. And it is not you. Every preschool and kindergarten Sunday school student knows the answer. It's Jesus! Samaritans are despised by the priests and Levites and teachers of the Law. What does Isaiah say of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant: "He was despised and rejected by men, and they esteemed Him not."

The Samaritan comes across the man on the side of the road and has "compassion." This is the favorite Greek word of the current, and once again newly elected, President of the LCMS Matthew Harrison. "Esplanknisthae" – which literally means "exposing your internal organs." It is where we get the word "spleen." We say we "pour our heart out" for someone. I guess the Greeks carried their emotions in their spleen. This is the same word used when Jesus looks upon the crowd of 5000 who were like sheep without a Shepherd. He has compassion on them.

The Good Samaritan is Jesus. He is the One who keeps the Law perfectly. Jesus finds you, the one who is beaten, robbed, and left for dead – this is what Satan did to Adam and all of his children. Those who want to justify themselves are of no use to you. They just walk by on the other side.

Jesus is the One who binds up your wounds, ironically by suffering wounds of His own. He picks you up in your sin and carries you because you cannot carry yourself. He anoints you – in Baptism. He pours wine into you – talk about foreshadowing the life of the church. He takes you to a sanctuary where you will be safe and He pays for everything that you may be fully healed.

How do I inherit eternal life? I look to the Good Samaritan who is actually the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.