

“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

Luke 10:25-37

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” How many times have you heard that in your life? We heard it twice just in our Scripture readings for today. That is a phrase from the Word of God that even the most crass pagans will be familiar with. Even the most vocal haters of Christ’s Church will say that this teaching is good for society.

Have you ever really contemplated the demand of God’s Law – Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself. Being back in Mellen last week, I was thinking about this. The church was up on the top of a hill with a small mountain to the North and woods to the West. To the East was our parking lot and then a drop-off to the town. The only home adjacent to ours was to the South. Ed lived there. Ed still lives there. I saw him.

Ed was willingly unemployed, yet could never find the time to mow his lawn. When it got out of control, the city would force him to do it. This happened about once a year. It’s a short summer up there.

I was in Ed’s house one time. There were stacks of empty beer boxes. There was fuzzy green stuff growing in the sink. And there was no way I was going to spend any more time there than I had to. I had gone over there to be a good neighbor and introduce myself – being the

new pastor in town. But my sinfulness manifested itself quickly. I did not love my neighbor as myself, and I got out of there and never stepped foot in his home ever again.

When my sink is dirty, I clean my sink. Or, in my sinfulness, I ask a subtle question of Malinda if she thinks the sink needs to be cleaned as I head out the door for my busy day. I did not go over to Ed's house and clean his sink. I do not love my neighbor as myself.

I know that Ed is an extreme case. So then, if I want to justify myself: "Who is my neighbor?" We like to help our neighbors and be of service to them. If a tree falls on your neighbor's house, perhaps you help him cut up the wood; perhaps you provide food or shelter for the family. However, pulling out your checkbook and paying for the damage or even the insurance deductible probably doesn't happen.

The demands of the Law are impossible to maintain. You cannot do enough to inherit eternal life. And maybe you helped your neighbor by going above and beyond the call of duty. Maybe you went and cleaned Ed's sink. Did you clean any other porcelain plumbing products as often as you clean your own?

Love your neighbor as yourself is what God's Law demands. You are not inheriting eternal life by what you do. God's Law can only be overcome by God's Son. You are saved by grace alone.

This does not mean that how you treat your neighbor doesn't matter. It just means that you don't punch your ticket to heaven by being a "good" person in the eyes of society. Jesus said, "Let your light

shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” He says that if you give even a cup of cold water to someone as a response to your relationship with God, this is seen by God as a great and meaningful work within His kingdom. Being a good neighbor is important. It is a demonstration, a response to all that God has done for you. But how can I call myself “good” in the eyes of God’s Law when I do not love my neighbor as myself? You will never be “good” in the eyes of God’s Law.

And we haven’t even talked about the more important side of the summary of God’s Law: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.”

Every thought, every desire of your heart is to focus on the Lord your God and what He has done for you. I am a poor, miserable sinner. I have sinned in thought, word, and deed by what I have done and by what I have left undone.

There is no blessing like the grace of God. Just like me, you have failed in keeping God’s Law. The Son of God did not fail. The Son of God carried the burden of your sin for you.

We marvel at the compassion that the Good Samaritan had for the man along the roadside. Samaritans and Jews were mortal enemies. He first had to forgive; then he bound up his wounds, placed him on his own animal, cared for him in the inn, and paid for all the expenses.

That is the level of care we would have to offer to all of our neighbors – our close friends and the Ed’s of the world. Yet the love

shown by the Good Samaritan pales in comparison to the love that God the Father has shown to you. You were born in the total corruption of your sinful nature. St. Paul says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God." You were a blind, dead, enemy of God. Yet He loved you.

You had broken all of His Law. You had no chance to make things right. You had no chance to inherit eternal life. As an act of grace and compassion, God the Father sent His Son, His only-begotten Son, to fulfill the Law and suffer and die to pay the penalty for your sins that the Law demands. The Law says the wages of sin is death. God the Father chose to place His Son between you and the Law.

There is no blessing like the grace of God. In thanks for His grace, love your neighbor, that they may see your good deeds and join you in praising your Father in heaven. Amen.