

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 5
Saturday, July 9, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, July 10, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

Luke 10:25-37

The expert in the law asked Jesus the question that seems to always be on the mind of those sitting on the fringe of God’s church: “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The man who asked this question knew the answer, and it was the right answer. But it was really the wrong question to ask. He asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He should have asked, “What has *God* done that I may inherit eternal life?”

But this fellow who was talking to Jesus did not want to know what God does in our lives; he wanted to know what he needed to do to save himself. He clearly demonstrates that he already knew the answer: “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 love your neighbor as yourself.” It is always so good to know the right answers and have them readily available. This is why we spend time memorizing Luther’s Small Catechism.

But what did knowing the right answer to the question actually get this “expert in the Law.” He needed a “What does this mean?” explanation. So, as

Jesus often does, He gives him a “What does this mean?” and He tells him the parable of the Good Samaritan. Basically, the point Jesus makes is that, in order to fulfill what God demands of us, we would need to be perfect in every way. We would need to treat every person that we meet in the same way that the Good Samaritan treated the man on the roadside.

However, first you need to understand the parable. Find yourself in the parable. Here’s a hint: you are not the Good Samaritan. You could be the priest or the Levite (hopefully not), but Jesus’ point is that you are the half-dead man on the side of the road who is helpless, who will die without the mercy of the Good Samaritan, and who has no chance of paying back the grace he has been shown. You are beaten, bloodied, and penniless.

There are people today and there have been people throughout the history of the Christian church who have thought that it was possible to take on the role of salvation or at least contribute toward the keeping of the Law. There is only One who could keep all of God’s Law and thereby fulfill it. To say that you have to add something to the work of Jesus for the Gospel to be complete is to completely miss the message of the Gospel. God’s forgiveness is solely brought through faith in Christ’s suffering and death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave.

I pity those who imagine that the blood of Christ is insufficient to cover all sins, especially the worst of sins. Can you imagine? That would leave you

imagining that God judges you according to the worst moments of your life. The joy that we experience in the faith of our Baptism would be unknown. The grace of God would be unknown. For anyone who places their hope for salvation and eternal life in their own actions, in their own works, I can't imagine the despair.

This is what Martin Luther dealt with. Of all the things Luther wrote, nothing sticks with me more than his Preface to the 1st set of Luther's Works published a year before he died. He wrote about what he experienced in his early years as a monk and a priest. His journey to Rome was a major frustration. He bought indulgences and it left him empty. His study of God's Word, especially the phrase "the righteousness of God" confused him. He wrote that he "hated that righteous God," who he saw as sitting up in heaven waiting to punish us sinners. Only when he understood that it is God's righteousness that He places on us that makes us holy in the eyes of God did his attitude toward God change. Luther said "it was as if the gates of heaven opened" to him.

This joy of the Gospel is something that we are tempted to take for granted. We will inherit eternal life, but not because we are such good people, or have kept God's commands. We have done absolutely nothing to deserve the mercy and forgiveness that God has shown to us. We will inherit eternal life because the Holy Spirit called us to faith in our Baptism, and we return again and again to hear the message that through the blood of Christ our sins have been

forgiven, and we come again and again hungering and thirsting to receive Christ's Body and Blood at the Lord's Table. These are the Means of Grace. This is the vehicle through which God bestows His grace upon you. You are not going to find it anywhere else.

We see how it is God, and God alone, who has brought about a fundamental change in His people. We were dead in our sins; we are now alive in Christ. We are the man half-dead on the side of the road. We are only alive because of Christ.

And that is what the story of the Good Samaritan is all about. This is not just the story of one man helping another. The Jews hated the Samaritans. The Jews hated the Samaritans more than they hated the Romans. This story is first and foremost a story of forgiveness. Before the Good Samaritan did any kind deed, he needed to forgive this Jew, this ancestral enemy of the Samaritans. It was unheard of for Samaritans and Jews to even speak to one another, let alone in kindness, and let alone show the love and mercy that this man did.

And now because the Lord has first forgiven us, because He first loved us, He now says: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The good works that we perform do not earn ourselves points toward eternal life. The good works that we do are thank offerings for the forgiveness of sins, which we have already received in faith. The gates of heaven have been opened to you. Amen.