

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is *‘the Good Samaritan’* and is based on the text from the Gospel of St. Luke, the tenth chapter. Let us pray . . . Amen.

Today’s reading from the Gospel of Luke is the very familiar story of the Good Samaritan. A man gets mugged, beaten, stripped, and robbed on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The muggers leave him to die. Afterwards, two representatives of the high moral society . . . a priest and a Levite . . . notice the poor victim and pass him by on the far side of the road. Next, a representative of the scum of the earth comes by in the form of a Samaritan, and this scum has compassion and saves the victim’s life.

This parable is so powerful that the Samaritan has become the icon for people who come to the aid of strangers. We even have “Good Samaritan” laws which prevent helpful strangers from law suits in the event a rescue is not entirely successful.

Yet, to really get the full impact of this story, you need the context of the conversation which Jesus had with a lawyer immediately before He told the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is very important to understand the context for Jesus’ parable.

First of all, a lawyer stood up and questioned Jesus saying: *“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* (Luke 10:25) He was asking a law question which required an answer from the law. So Jesus asked the lawyer to consider the law. Jesus responded by asking: *“What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”* (Luke 10:26) This is sort of like Jesus asking this lawyer to remember what he learned in confirmation class . . . to recite the basics of the law.

The lawyer quickly recited the words from memory. *He answered, “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 neighbour as yourself.”* (Luke 10:27) This is the right answer, and is what God commanded Moses to tell the people in the Old Testament lesson today. As a result Jesus *said to the lawyer, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”* (Luke 10:28)

Now here the lawyer made a mistake we all make. He should have just walked away after hearing Jesus’ answer. But, deep down inside, the lawyer knew he didn’t have the ability to love his neighbour as he should. Being crushed by the demands of the Law, he should have confessed that He did not love God or his neighbour as the Law demands. Instead, he asked Jesus to provide a loop hole. He asked Jesus, *“And who is my neighbour?”* (Luke 10:29) The lawyer was hoping Jesus would put some kind of limitation on the word neighbour. The lawyer was hoping Jesus would make the Law more manageable. Then loving his neighbour would be so much easier. This is when Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan.

It is surprising how often we try to weaken the law in order to make it doable—to make it more palatable? Recently, the United States Supreme Court followed Canada and a number of other countries by ruling in a way which would allow homosexual partners to identify themselves as married. This is another step in an ongoing process to weaken God’s Commandment: *“You shall not commit adultery.”* (Exodus 20:14) This decision is another step designed to destroy the institution of marriage and the family which God ordained in the Garden of Eden. It is a weakening of the law to give people license to engage in all kinds of obscene behavior and still feel good about themselves.

But the 6th Commandment is far from the only Commandment society, the devil, and the world are trying to destroy. Just look in your own life and in the world around you. Jesus clearly says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:21-22) Can you honestly say you have never been angry with anyone or hard harsh words with them? Jesus also said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" (Matthew 5:27-28) Is your thought life absolutely pure? What about stealing? Have you ever taken a longer break than allowed? Have you made personal copies on the company photocopier without paying for them? Have you 'borrowed' items from work which you conveniently forgot to return?

An honest examination of the law clearly shows we are murderers, adulterers, thieves, liars, and so forth. No wonder we want to weaken the law. We want to weaken the law so that we don't feel guilty, so we don't feel bad about ourselves or our sinful actions. After all, the most important thing in life is for us is to be happy, right? If we weaken the law so that we can be happier, that's a good thing, right?

Actually, no it is not. God didn't give the Law to make us feel good about ourselves; God gave the Law to crush us under its expectations and demands. God gave the Law to show us how immensely far we have fallen short and how much we desperately need a Saviour.

Jesus puts an end to the lawyer's thinking that he could uphold the law and thereby save himself by choosing a Samaritan as the hero of the parable. The Jews hated the Samaritans. They were mortal enemies. If it weren't for the Roman occupation, the Jews and the Samaritans would be at war. As far as the Jews were concerned, the only good Samaritan was a dead Samaritan, and the Samaritans more or less thought the same way about the Jews.

So when Jesus chose a Samaritan to be the hero of His parable, He didn't weaken the Law, He strengthened the law and its demands. Jesus told this lawyer that even the loathed Samaritan was his neighbour. Jesus boldly told him, and everyone else in earshot, that there is no limit on who is your neighbour. Everyone you meet as you go about your life is your neighbour, and God's Law commands you to love your neighbour as you love yourself.

Now, in hearing this your response should be, "Pastor, I can't do that. Some people scare me, other smell bad or just aren't clean, and then there are those others of questionable morals. There are some people that I will never love no matter how hard I try." and you would be right.

No one can love with the kind of love that God calls for in His commandments.

We do not love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. We do not love our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus calls us to be the Samaritan in the parable of the Good Samaritan, but we can't do it.

The Law calls us to be the Samaritan, but in reality we end up being the victim. The devil, the world, and even our own sinful flesh have mugged, beaten, stripped, and left us to die with, and in, our own sin. Spiritually speaking, we are not just near death. We are, in fact, literally dead in our own trespasses and sin. [Ephesians 2:1]

There is no help for us in the law. The law passes by us and is disgusted with our wretched condition just as the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the victim in Jesus' parable. The law commands us to help ourselves and others, but we are dead in sin and can't help either.

Yet, thank God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit there is One who can, and did fulfill the Law. Jesus Christ did keep the law of love. He filled the role of the Good Samaritan for us. He lived a life of perfection. He loved his neighbour, including you and I, enough to sacrifice Himself in our place. He generously applies the oil of His righteous life and the wine of His own blood to our limp dead bodies. *"He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed."* (Isaiah 52:5) He gave us His righteousness and took our sins onto Himself as He suffered and died on the cross for us.

Jesus picked you up off the road, clothed you with His righteousness, and carried you to the inn of the church. There He gave instructions to His pastor to care for you. He has given the pastor something way better than an unlimited credit card or a blank check. Christ left His Word, Holy Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Lord's Supper with the inn of the church. He has given His pastor instructions to use these Means of Grace to tend to the well being of all those who have been beaten up and crushed by sin. With these Means of Grace, the pastor tends to the victims of sin, death, and the devil, and through them the Holy Spirit restores you to eternal life in Christ.

If you want to live by the law, then you must live up to the example of love in the parable of the Good Samaritan. You, and I, cannot do that. Sin mugs us, beats us, strips us, and leaves us dead on the side of the road. Not injured, but completely spiritually dead.

Our only hope is for Jesus to take on the role of the Good Samaritan. Only He can rescue you and heal you. Jesus is the one who set His face to go to Jerusalem so that He could die for you on the cross. He is also the one who rose from the dead to give you the promise of eternal life with Him. He offers you forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation.

Don't mess up this salvation by trying to do your part to save yourself. You can't help yourself. Jesus has already written you into His will, and He has died. Jesus Christ has taken up the role of the Good Samaritan in your place. Jesus Christ has already earned your forgiveness. The inheritance of eternal life is already yours.

The Holy Spirit administers Jesus' estate by transmitting forgiveness to you by the Means of Grace ... through Word and Sacrament. The Holy Spirit establishes the faith which receives that forgiveness as it trusts in Jesus. There is nothing left to do. When it comes to your salvation, God does all the work. *"It is finished."* (John 19:30). You have already inherited eternal life. It is yours in Christ. Amen.

Text adapted from Rev. James T. Batchelor's sermon for July 14, 2013, the 8th Sunday after Pentecost. Rev. J.T. Batchelor is the pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hoopston, IL.