

### 9.3.2023 Trinity 13 (Luke 10:23-37)

We've all heard stories in which people are identified as Good Samaritans. In our day, this term is often applied to someone who pulls over to help a stranded motorist, or offers assistance to a person who needs medical attention, or someone who steps into the middle of a dangerous situation in an effort to stop a violent crime. The modern definition of a Good Samaritan is generally expressed as anyone "who is compassionate and helpful to a person in distress" (Dictionary.com), and while there is truth in the way most people would define this term today, if we step back in time, and in context reflect on the original meaning of the title Good Samaritan, we will discover a much richer and more meaningful definition of the Good Samaritan that God has created, and now calls each of us to be.

We've all heard stories about Good Samaritans, but many people in our post-Christian culture aren't aware of the fact that this term dates back to a parable Jesus told, a story He shared to help a certain lawyer, and to help every one of us, answer the questions: Who is my neighbor, and what shall I do to inherit eternal life? One of the first things we learn from our Gospel lesson this morning is the truth that this parable, which has become to so many little more than a story to encourage good deeds, was actually presented to answer the most important questions a person can ask about this life, and the life to come.

The parable of the Good Samaritan was introduced to us today, in context, by a lawyer who stood up to put Jesus to the test, asking Him, "*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, What is written in the Law? How do you read it? And 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 neighbor as yourself. And He said to him, You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?*" (Luke 10:25-29).

From the beginning, this dialogue between the lawyer and our Lord reveals to us that the pathway to heaven is paved with love. Jesus said, "*On these two commandments,*" love God and love your neighbor, "*hang all the Law and the Prophets*" (Matthew 22:37-40). Yet the lawyer, like the rest of us, wanted

to justify all that he had done, and all that he had left undone, regarding his neighbor. The lawyer didn't question, or express any concern, about his duty toward God. No doubt this man had observed the fasts, prayed the appointed prayers, and scrupulously paid the tithe. As far as he could see, there was no reason for his conscience to be troubled regarding those things he offered to God, but in regards to his neighbor, he didn't possess such certainty, and therefore the lawyer asked the question (*Who is my neighbor?*), perhaps hoping that Jesus would ease his conscience, but such relief wouldn't come.

Instead of assuring this man that his neighbor was found only among Israelites and Pharisees, or the people of his own hometown and synagogue, our Lord instead told a parable about a Jewish man who traveled "*from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way...*" One of his own people. "*... and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite...*" Again, one of his own countrymen. "*... when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan...*" The hated enemy of Israel, those that were considered to be the worst of the human race. "*... as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him* (Luke 10:30-34).

A great truth is expressed at the conclusion of this parable when our Lord asks the lawyer, "*Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise*" (Luke 10:37-37). Instead of comforting the lawyer's conscience, instead of allowing this man continue in the false notion that he could love his neighbor and hate his enemy, Jesus told a story that echoes the truth He expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, when He commanded His disciples to "*Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you...*" Go, and do thou likewise, said our Lord, "*... that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:44-45).

Contrary to the modern interpretation, this parable was not told merely to encourage good deeds, but rather to tear down the walls that we build between “us” and “them.” In context, a Good Samaritan is not simply defined as anyone who is compassionate and helpful to a person in distress. We are not “Good Samaritans” when we reach out to care for those we love. Instead, a Good Samaritan is the hated enemy, the despised outsider who cares for us when we are left half dead. As we read in these headlines, the Good Samaritan is the black state trooper who helped the injured white supremacist protester, or the young, Muslim men who stood outside a Catholic church to defend Christians after a deadly attack, or the black man who spent a year in prison for a crime he didn’t commit, and after being released, saved the life of a white police officer by pulling him out of his burning patrol car, or as Church Fathers such as St. Augustine and Origen suggest, the Good Samaritan, the outsider who came to bring comfort and healing, to love and to care for the weary, wounded traveler is Christ Himself.

Our Savior Christ is the Good Samaritan, and we were all the traveler who fell at the hand of our Enemy. The Enemy who left us half dead - stripped of human dignity and wounded by sin. It was Jesus, the Good Samaritan, who came down from heaven, who took on flesh and blood in order to be a neighbor to us (John 1:14), that He may bind up our wounds and carry us into His Church where we are provided with the healing graces of Word and Sacrament.

Christ has shown Himself to be a neighbor to us not in name only, but in deed and in truth, and all who have received Him, who believe in His name, who have been healed by the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit, are called to be imitators of Him. Jesus said, “*Go, and do thou likewise.*” Be a neighbor to those who have fallen among thieves, draw near to them. In Christian love bind up their wounds, bear their burdens, carry them into His Church where they may receive the grace that has been given to you. “*Go, and do thou likewise.*” Be a Good Samaritan. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. By the grace and mercy of Almighty God, “*Do this, and you will live.*”