

Season after PENTECOST

Prayer

Let us pray to the Lord for the sake of all people in need and that, as the redeemed of the Lord, we may know and love the Law and walk in its ways to the glory of God, who hears our prayers.

Collect of the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, in Your deep compassion You rescue us from whatever may hurt us. Teach us to love You above all things and to love our neighbours as ourselves; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 41 (antiphon v. 1)
Leviticus (18:1-5) 19:9-18
Colossians 1:1-14
Luke 10:25-37

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 845
Other Hymns – 683 (OT, G), 803 (OT), 526 (E), 698 (G, OT), 851 (G, E), 869 (G, E), 852 (G)

Almighty God, You have given us Your Word so that we might know Your ways and live in obedience to Your commands. Deliver us from the evils we have done and, by the grace of Your forgiveness, help us to live according to Your commands and give glory to Your holy name. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Almighty God, You have shown us Your mercy in Your Son, Jesus Christ, who became our Good Samaritan to save us from all evil and death. Give us such a compassionate heart that we may not be blind to the needs of others but show to all Your mercy and love. Bind up our wounds, and send us forth to bind up the wounds of others with the healing balm of Your Gospel. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Almighty God, You have sent forth ministers in Your name to proclaim Your saving Gospel and thus deliver the sinner from darkness into Your Kingdom. Bless all pastors and church workers in their service to You, that they may be faithful in every responsibility placed upon them for our sake. Give us a willingness to hear the counsel of Your Word to correct our errors and repent of our sins. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Almighty God, You hold in Your hand all the might of man. Deliver our nation from our enemies; bless all those elected and appointed to serve us in government; and protect all those in the armed forces, the police, firefighters and emergency personnel. Bestow peace among the nations, and bring to nothing the plans of all who promote hate and violence. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Almighty God, because of the love You have for all the saints, we pray to You to heal the sick, relieve the suffering, comfort the grieving and give peace to the dying. Especially do we name before You [_____ and] all those we lift to You in our hearts. Strengthen them all by Your power,

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help them endure this trial, and help them bear the good fruit of faith even in their afflictions. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Almighty God, by Your mercy we are heirs of a great inheritance and stand in a long line of those who have loved You and have known the delight of Your favour. Accept our thanksgiving for the faithful who went before us, and bring us at last with all them into Your eternal presence, in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb that knows no end. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Almighty God, You have been faithful to us, who deserved none of Your mercies. Lead us to receive them with grateful hearts and to be faithful unto death, that we may receive the crown of everlasting life. Hear us in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, through whom, with whom and in whom be all honour and glory, both now and forever. Amen.

Season after **PENTECOST SERMON**

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 10, 2022

Sermon Text: Luke 10:25-37

'The End of Self-Justification'

Fellow baptized saints. Ask a law question, and you'll get a law answer. The question comes from a synagogue 'lawyer,' whose job it is to make the Bible reasonable and doable. His question is a law question. "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It's the most basic of all religious questions, isn't it? What do I have to do to get to heaven? What do I have to do to be saved? What do I have to do to be in good standing with God?

Think about the question in your own mind for a moment. What do you have to do to inherit something? Well, nothing really. Someone has to die, and you have to be on the receiving end of the inheritance. It's not about what you do, it's all up to the one who dies.

Jesus knows He's being put to the test, so He answers the question with a question. "What did Moses say? How do you understand him?" Did you see how Jesus left that open? The lawyer could have spoken about God's mighty works of deliverance in the Exodus, His mercy and saving actions – but he doesn't. The lawyer responds with the law – "Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Love your neighbour as yourself." That is what he believes one must do to inherit eternal life. Love God; love your neighbour. And that would be correct. The Law promises life . . . if you can do it. The Law promises grace and every blessing to all who keep the commandments . . . if you can keep the commandments. "Do this, and you will live." Conversely, don't do this; and, well, you're dead.

This doesn't satisfy the lawyer. He's uncomfortable. Something's nagging at him. Perhaps it was that poor man he had passed by on the way to the synagogue without even making eye contact. Or maybe it was the grudge he was holding against his brother for the bad business deal. Love your neighbour as yourself?!

He knew he loved God, but the neighbour was another matter. Some neighbours just aren't so lovable. That's why we build walls and fences. They make for better neighbours.

“Love your neighbour as yourself.” And we're not talking about feelings here either. The commandment is not about having favourable feelings towards other people. You know, having love in your heart for those around you. No! The Greek word is 'agape'. It is an action word. It is not a love in your heart. It is a love in your hands. Serve your neighbour. Act for your neighbour. Do all the things for your neighbour that you do for yourself. And the lawyer knows it. He knows he doesn't do this – none of us do. But he is on a mission to prove himself right. He is determined to ease his own conscience by telling himself that he is in the right.

Seeking to justify himself, he asks Jesus a second law question: “And who is my neighbour?” He is thinking – if I get 'neighbour' right, then I'll get love right. Get love right, and I'll win the big prize. So, tell me Jesus, who is my neighbour? There was a man - who fell among thieves - on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It was a dangerous road. The steady stream of pilgrims made it prime picking grounds for thugs and thieves alike. This man was probably returning home from Jerusalem, from worship, when he was jumped by robbers who stripped him, beat him bloody, and left him for dead in the ditch at the side of the road. Three men had the opportunity to be neighbour to the man who fell among the thieves. The first one saw him and passed by on the other side of the road, as far from the man as he could get. He was a priest. The second one who saw him also passed by on the other side of the road. He was a Levite, a special priestly assistant. It even made some sense.

There was, after all, a law that anyone who so much as brushed against something dead became ritually unclean and could not serve in a priestly capacity. Cleansing required a costly sacrifice and a lengthy period during which the priest or the Levite could not serve. They had good reason to go on the other side of the road. In fact, they would have been foolish not to. They had an obligation to maintain ritual purity. People were counting on them. So they did the prudent, safe, expedient thing. They did what you and I probably would have done even though we have no such law. They went on the other side of the road and refused to be a neighbour to the man who fell among thieves.

A third man passed by. He came to where the man was and stopped. He had compassion on the man who fell among thieves. He knew in his guts he had to do something. He went down into the ditch, to clean and bandage his wounds. He set him on his donkey and took him to the local inn where he spent the night. The next morning he left the man who fell among thieves in the hands of the innkeeper, gave him two days' wages and left his Visa card in case there were any additional charges.

Who then was a 'neighbour' to the man who fell among the thieves? The priest? The Levite? No. But rather, the Samaritan - a half-breed heretic to whom no Jew would give the time of day much less a drink of water and certainly not bend down to help. The Samaritan was a neighbour to the man who fell among thieves. The Samaritan showed mercy.

You - go and do the same thing. That's right. You heard it correctly. "Go and do likewise." Help every man, woman, and child who comes into your field of vision, regardless of how busy you are, regardless of your circumstances, regardless of what it will cost you. And while you're doing it, do it with the purest of intentions and attitudes. Do it not out of obligation or fear of punishment or promise of reward. Do it strictly out of love for the man who fell among thieves and out of love of God.

And do this perfectly for a lifetime if you want to earn eternal life by your works. This is Jesus' answer, and it makes the lawyer's self-justifying question seem rather silly. What are you doing - trying to haggle with God? And yet, we do it all the time. I hear it all the time, and I'm sure you do to. Is this a sin? Is that a sin? Can I do this without sinning? Does the Bible, the church, 'your church' permit this, that, or the other thing? In other words, my conscience is either accusing me and I want it to shut up, or it's looking for a way to make excuses. That man in the ditch at the side of the road, he's not my 'neighbour'. Why, I don't even know him. And besides, he looks dead for all intents and purposes. And if he's actually dead, and I'm a priest or a Levite, I'm going to have a lot of explaining to do with my home congregation when I arrive on the scene ceremonially unclean. Their first question to me is going to be, "What were you thinking? Why didn't you just call 911 and move on?" And so, if I define my terms just right, I can justify myself in NOT helping the man who fell among thieves. Do we hear ourselves. I can justify myself in NOT helping that man.

What I'm describing here is the life of legalism and pietism. And to one extent or another, it infects each of us. You do it all the time, whenever your conscience

tweaks you or when you encounter the Law. Let's say you get pulled over for speeding. What do you say? "Everyone else was going just as fast. I got passed by at least a dozen cars including a Prius. I was in a hurry. I was late to work." You have your reasons, and so you tell yourself you are justified in breaking the law. 'Reasons?!' . . . as long as I've got my reasons.

Even though this is not how true law works; we seek to justify ourselves by the law. That's what the old Adam does with the Law. He turns it into a bargaining chip with God, as though by our commandment-keeping we can obligate God to be on our side. Convince God He should have us. And we think we're good at it. We will do it any way we can. Think about it:

We try and bargain by loopholes and definitions – Did God really say? Who is my neighbour? At what point does it become adultery? How far is too far? How much is enough?

We try and bargain by making comparisons – I'm not as bad as those people over there. I go to church fairly regularly. I give as much as I think I can.

We try and bargain by our righteous causes – I'm pro-life, pro-environment, pro-human rights, women's rights, immigrant rights, animal rights, pro-[insert the name of your righteous cause here] rights; and therefore God loves me and approves of me regardless of the other stuff I do and say.

We try and bargain by an appeal to inner goodness – 'Deep down, I'm a really good person.'

We try and bargain by generalization – 'I've led a good life overall.'

We try and bargain by an appeal to justice – 'Well, he hit me first'; and therefore I was justified in hitting him back.

We try and bargain by laws we make up – 'I don't drink, smoke, play cards, or dance.' Never mind there are no commandments against these things; yet, somehow we feel justified. I recycled all my plastics this year. Justified.

There are countless others, but we'll quit at seven. You get the point. Whenever we use the Law to justify ourselves, we are going to find that the Law will turn on us and condemn us. Kill us. The Law was not given to justify us before God, but to silence every mouth, to condemn every person, to kill sin and the sinner,

to magnify and amplify sin, to consign all people everywhere to disobedience, death, and damnation.

There is only one way for a sinner to keep the Law. Faith. The Law is upheld by faith in Christ, who alone kept the Law perfectly in our place. There is only one way to quiet that accusing/excusing conscience of yours and that is faith in Christ – trust that Jesus has done in His flesh what you cannot do in yours; namely, keeping the Law perfectly - both outwardly and inwardly, and by becoming sin for us, putting sin to death in His own innocent death.

Jesus became our ‘neighbour’. The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us. He moved in next door. Jesus became that Good Samaritan who bent down in the ditch to rescue a bloodied and beaten humanity. Jesus loved His neighbour and He loved God. He fulfilled the Law with His love. And in His love for us, for all of humanity, for His whole creation, He became the man who fell among thieves, crucified between two of them, bloodied and beaten by a world who did not want Him or His way of salvation. He was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification.

Do you wish to be justified before God? Then don’t look to the Law and search out loopholes and legalisms. Look to Christ on the cross. Trust in Him and not in yourselves. For a man is justified by faith alone in Christ alone apart from any works of the law.

Look again at that man who fell among thieves lying there naked and bleeding in the ditch. Does he look familiar to you? He looks an awful lot like Christ, doesn’t he? “As often as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me.” That man is Christ incognito for you to serve. He’s not there for you to use to justify yourself before God. All the good that the Good Samaritan did - did not justify him before God.

No, that man in the ditch is not some opportunity for you to notch brownie points in heaven. He’s there for you to serve with God’s goodness and mercy, to love as you have been loved by Christ. There are no laws that can produce this kind of goodness and mercy. It comes from freedom, from one who has died to the Law. You. I’m talking about you. Paul says, “There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” And you are in Christ. That is your umbrella for freedom. That is your escape route when the Law paints you into a corner and you cannot help but sin. Sin boldly, as Luther advised; but trust Christ yet more boldly.

What do you have to do to inherit something? Someone has to die, and you need to be on the receiving end of the inheritance. That is exactly what has happened in Christ. This is how God gives His eternal inheritance – even eternal life with Him – through the death of His Son on the cross . . . the man who was hung between thieves, stripped, beaten, bloodied and left for dead. In Him you are on the receiving end of every good – forgiveness, life and salvation. Yes, you are in His arms, on His shoulders, safe in His Inn – and He is footing the entire bill with His own blood. Come, and taste. In Jesus' name. Amen.