

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Trinity 13 – August 25, 2024**  
**Luke 10:23-37 – The Good Samaritan**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The church possesses many wonderful treasures for teaching the gospel. Among them are the sacraments, the distinction of law and gospel, liturgy, and hymnody. Another great treasure is the lectionary. The lectionary is the collection of appointed texts for each Sunday of the church year, beautifully arranged to link every Sunday together. Sometimes the reading selections may seem arbitrary, but they are not. No Sunday stands alone or disconnected. They all fit together.

Today's reading about the Good Samaritan is a great example. Because it builds on the readings from the last two Sundays, fitting beautifully into the theme of the whole Trinity season.

For here in the heart of the green season of the church year, the time of the church, the overarching theme is the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. In the church, the Holy Spirit causes us to grow in faith. He teaches us what Jesus has done for us, and he keeps us steadfast until the day of his return. So the whole Trinity season is about why we should come to church, what we receive in church in the word and sacrament of Jesus, and how we should grow together in the church in love as the body of Christ.

Therefore, the past three Sundays have all been reminding us what we receive from Jesus in the church. Two weeks ago, when the Pharisee and the tax collector went up to the temple to pray, the lesson was that when we go up to the church, we must not come before God in our self-righteousness like the haughty Pharisee, reminding God of all the good things we've done and thanking him that we're not like other men. No, we must come in humble, penitent faith, confessing that we are sinners. "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner," said the tax collector. Therefore he alone of the two went down to his home justified.

And then, last week, Jesus healed a deaf and mute man. He thrust his fingers into the man's ears and spit and touched his tongue. And he sighed and said, "Ephphatha! Be opened!" So immediately the man's tongue was unleashed to speak plainly. This miracle shows what Jesus does for you in the church. He heals you and opens you to believe the gospel: to believe that he sighed and groaned for you on the cross, that he opened his tomb and burst forth, all for you. And now in the church Jesus sends you the Holy Spirit, the finger of God, to touch you and open your hearts through baptism. Through water and the word, the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see Jesus by faith. He opens your ears to hear preaching and his word, and he opens your tongue to speak plainly, to confess what God has done for you, in words of faith that draw others into the church.

Today, our parable builds on all these themes. The Good Samaritan brings together everything Jesus does for us in the church. For we are not the Good Samaritan. No, that is Jesus. We are the man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, going away from the church. Going the wrong way, his own way. He was going away from the temple, away from the house of God, from the protection of God's holy city. And as he went, he was waylaid by robbers and stripped and beaten and left for dead. So it is for us. If we leave the church, we're exposed to the attacks of the devil and the world. Temptation overcomes us easily, we're dragged into sin, stripped of the righteousness of God, beaten and left for dead in our trespasses and guilt.

But thanks be to God. Though we are faithless, God remains faithful. The Good Samaritan comes looking for you. And when Jesus sees you, he has compassion. He puts on oil and wine, the anointing of baptism, the wine of his blood in communion, to heal all your wounds. Then he carries you back to where to belong. To the inn, the church. And here he puts you under the care of an innkeeper, the pastor, to take care of you and nurture you until the day of his return.

So you see how the Sundays of the church year all build on each other. Two weeks ago the message was, "Come to church in penitent faith to receive forgiveness." Last week the message was, "Come to church to receive the Holy Spirit, who opens your eyes and ears to believe in Jesus, who opens your mouth to confess him." And today the message is, "Come to church, where Jesus binds up your wounds and saves you from the attacks of the world."

Even the vocabulary of the three Sundays links them together. For today's reading about the Good Samaritan shares a key vocabulary word with last week's reading about the deaf and mute man. The Greek word *orthos*: right, straight, orthodox. When Jesus spit and touched the mute man's tongue, his tongue was unleashed

so that he spoke *orthos*, rightly. And now today Jesus responds to the lawyer's question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus turns the question around, "What does the Law say?" And the lawyer answers *orthos*, rightly, "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." So Jesus says to him, "You have answered correctly, *orthos*. Do this, and you will live."

Both of them, the deaf-mute man and the lawyer, they both spoke rightly. Except the lawyer spoke rightly according to the law; the deaf man according to the gospel. One was concerned about what he should do for God; the other rejoiced in what God has done for him.

But there's more connections. Today's reading about the Good Samaritan also shares a key vocabulary word with the gospel reading two weeks ago about the Pharisee and the tax collector. This time, the shared word is *dikaios*: righteous, justified. It was not the self-righteous Pharisee but the repentant tax collector who went down to his home from the temple *dikaios*, justified. So also the lawyer today, when he finds himself in over his head in the debate with Jesus, he finds it necessary to justify himself, to show that he is *dikaios*, that he does love his neighbor adequately. So he asks, "And who is my neighbor?"

How often we do the same! How often we try to justify ourselves! Our first impulse is always to excuse ourselves, minimize our sin. "Don't blame me, I was caught up in the heat of the moment. I was under a lot of stress. I've got so much going on, I didn't really mean it." No, the only good thing to say is, "I have sinned, I have not loved my neighbor as myself, I have loved myself more than my God. Have mercy on me, a sinner."

If only we would stop trying to justify ourselves! Then the parable of the Good Samaritan would cease to be for us a law parable. It would become a gospel parable. Then we would understand what Jesus is really teaching in this parable, that everyone in the whole world is truly our neighbor, but we have failed miserably to be Good Samaritans as the law demands. We cannot do it. The task is too overwhelming. Because we are not God, and that is the point.

The point is that you are not the Good Samaritan. You are the dying man, wounded in the road, desperately needing help. You need Jesus to come and lift you up and bind your wounds and bring you into the church, and heal you by the gospel.

So even when Jesus concludes his parable with the punchline, "You go and do likewise," the gospel meaning is this: "Go ahead and try to justify yourself, but your efforts will surely fail. There is nothing you can do to obtain eternal life. That is purely a gift, received by faith. Let me justify you, let me heal you. Only then will you begin to live and speak rightly, by faith."

Stop focusing on the law, on what you must do to inherit eternal life. As Paul says in Galatians, "For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

You need Jesus. You need the Good Samaritan to offer himself in your place. For although you were going down to Jericho, heading in the wrong direction – although you constantly stray from the church, your Jesus set his face in a journey going the other way. On his final journey, Jesus went up from Jericho toward Jerusalem, for you. And there he entered the temple, and drove out the moneychangers (that was the reading three Sundays ago – they're all connected). And there he gave himself up to be mocked and stripped and beaten and crucified, all for you. He is the one who suffered at the hands of violent men, suffering far worse than anything you endure. All that you deserve fell on him. He bore your punishment. And now Jesus comes to you in compassion, in the church, to heal and rescue you. That is true righteousness, true orthodoxy.

So rejoice and give thanks, for now you are free. Not burdened by the demands of the law. You are free to begin obeying the law, loving God and your neighbor, caring for those in need, not for the sake of obtaining eternal life or justifying yourself. No, simply in thanksgiving for what God has done for you. You are free, justified and clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.