St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 13 – August 30, 2026
Luke 10:23-37 – The True Good Samaritan
Rev Peter Wagner

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

This week, there was a terrible flash flood in Nepal. A glacier collapsed, causing a wall of water to rush down the mountain into the valley, through towns and villages, overwhelming everything in its path. Hundreds of people were swept away, entire towns wiped out. Lord have mercy.

Meanwhile in Haiti, gang violence in the capital city is causing widespread panic, disease and malnutrition, as people flee into the countryside to escape.

Meanwhile, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a deadly ebola outbreak is raging out of control. Lord have mercy.

Meanwhile in Sudan, an ongoing civil war has caused disease, mass displacement, and looting. The education system and infrastructure have completely collapsed, and war crimes and atrocities are being committed daily. Half the population lacks adequate water, medicine, and healthcare. Lord have mercy.

Around the world, people are suffering. Right here in Iowa, we have domestic violence, poverty, alcoholism, and drug abuse, all around us. People can't afford to provide for their families. They're barely keeping their heads above water. Lord have mercy.

But in the gospel reading today, Jesus teaches us that all of these people are our neighbors, fellow human beings, created in the image of God. Who is my neighbor? Everyone, all around you. Everyone that God puts in your path, as you go about your life.

And Jesus teaches that God wants us to love and serve our neighbor. Helping your neighbor is really loving and serving God himself. God doesn't need your good works. Your neighbor does.

Now, it's easy to hear about all of these catastrophes, and grow numb to them. It seems like every day a new disaster or humanitarian crisis is mentioned on the news. There's just so much tragedy and suffering in the world, we can't keep track of it all.

We already have so much going on in our own lives, here at home, that it's easy to give up. How can we do anything for those people in Napal, and Haiti, and Sudan? We don't want to see anyone suffering, but it's just beyond our control. It keeps us humble to know that we can't help everyone. Only God can.

Don't be discouraged. The neighbor you need to help today is the one God has put in your path, right in front of you. Focus on those who are within your reach.

As for those far away, if it's not within your power to help them directly, you can still pray. Prayer is not useless. God hear the prayers of those who call upon him by faith. The prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Help the needy, O God, throughout the world. Have mercy on all who are suffering. And open our eyes to those we can reach, in our daily vocations. Show us ways we can help. Let us never pass the needy by, but teach us to be Good Samaritans to a world in need.

For truly, loving our neighbor is loving Christ. Serving our neighbor is serving Christ.

We should do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. For since Christ died for all, we should care for all. And we should especially care for our fellow Christians, our brothers and sisters in Christ, because together we are one body, his body, the church.

This is what Jesus said in the parable of the sheep and the goats. He said that on the Last Day, he will commend the believers for their acts of mercy. He will tell them, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." And then he will add, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers," – believers – "you did it to me."

The point is this: When the Good Samaritan saw the man lying by the side of the road and helped him, it was as if he saw Jesus in his need, and helped him. And we should do the same.

We should always be doing good works, and helping the needy, because good works reveal a living, active faith, a faith that sees Christ hidden in and behind our neighbor.

Now, all of this is true. We should be like the Good Samaritan. If we want to keep God's royal law, if we want to truly love God with all our heart and love our neighbor as ourselves, then we must care for all. Care for the needy. Have compassion. Bind up their wounds, pour on oil and wine, and take care of them, at your own expense.

But as you do these things, always remember this: You are not the true Good Samaritan. Jesus is. He is the one who helped you first, in your need. Even if you have never been poor and needy, even if you have never been hit with a humanitarian crisis – still, long before you ever started to become like the Good Samaritan in the parable, you were the poor man. You were the one in need. You were the one beaten and robbed and left for dead.

That was your spiritual condition, apart from faith. That was how you were in God's sight, before Christ came and ministered to you. You were lost and dead in your trespasses and sins, utterly without hope. And even now that you have been rescued, that old sinful nature still clings to you, trying to drag you back down. Pride always lurks behind those who try to be Good Samaritans. Pride always tries to deceive us, that we can earn God's favor by what we do.

In the Gospel reading, when Jesus told the lawyer, "Go and do likewise," go be like the Good Samaritan, it was because this lawyer was trusting in the Law. The lawyer wanted to know exactly what he should do to inherit eternal life, just how much was good enough. But Jesus wanted him to see how all-encompassing the Law truly is. The Law demands perfection, perfection we can never attain. So Jesus wants to turn us from trusting in ourselves and what we do, back to himself, the true Good Samaritan, and what he has done for us, to love us perfectly.

Yes, you are not the Good Samaritan. Jesus is. Like the Samaritans, despised by the Jews, Jesus was also despised. But he had compassion for the world, for all nations. He is the one who found you, dead in your trespasses and sins, and rescued you. He took pity on you, and bound up your wounds with the Gospel.

He poured on the anointing oil of baptism, oil that cleanses you and makes you whole. And he poured on the wine of his own blood, blood to wash you from all sin.

And then, your Good Samaritan carried you to the inn, the church, and entrusted you to the innkeeper, a pastor. And here in the church, Christ pays for all your expenses himself. He pays for all your sins, so you might be healed.

And Jesus also gives the innkeeper two denarii, the word and the sacraments, everything necessary to take care of you. That is the mercy you have already been shown.

So Jesus is the true Good Samaritan. We are merely the poor man, beaten and stripped and left for dead. However hard we try to help others, we still always need the true Savior's help.

But really, at an even deeper level, we should admit that we are not even the poor man in the parable. Jesus is. Really, our condition was far worse than the poor man beaten and left for dead. We were the robbers, the attackers, the ones who caused all the suffering in the first place.

We were not only dead in our sins, we were enemies of God.

But Christ is the man who was beaten and stripped and left for dead, because of us. We attacked him, and stripped him, and crucified him, so that he died, all in love for us.

He suffered all this at our hands. Yet, he gladly endured it all to redeem us, to bring us back to God, and call us out of darkness into his kingdom of light.

So as we go about our daily lives, saved by his blood, miserable sinners lifted out of the ashes, enemies of God converted by his saving death and resurrection, we ought never to think of ourselves more highly than we ought.

Instead, we ought to love God by serving our neighbor, praying for those in need, and helping the poor and the sick however we can, all in gratitude for the all the tremendous mercy we have enjoyed from Christ Jesus, our true Good Samaritan. Amen.

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