

Luke 10:25-37

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious for being a danger for travelers, especially a man traveling by himself. And so it's not surprising that robbers come upon the man in the parable. He doesn't have a chance. They strip him, beat him, and leave him for dead. They have no compassion at all. They give nothing, but take everything.

The Priest and Levite would never actually rob a man, but they really are no different from the robbers. They, too, have no compassion. They could help the man, but they choose not to. The robbers sin by what they do; the Priest and Levite sin by what they fail to do.

Where do you fit in here? Sometimes we act like the robbers; sometimes like the Priest and Levite. We do sins of commission, and sins of omission. We, too, are less than compassionate. The person who says proudly, "I've never hurt so much as a child in all my life," has also never lifted a finger to help the millions of babies being slaughtered each year by abortion. At times we rob our neighbor - of his good name, by speaking poorly about him to others. Far more often we are the Priest and Levite by failing to help our neighbor in his need even though we could.

You and I are also the man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. We fell among robbers at birth. Satan and his demons stripped us of God's good gifts, beat us up with the sin we inherited from our parents, and left us to die in our sins. And so we lie along the path mortally wounded, and the world doesn't care. It kicks us when we are already down. Corruption in our government infuriates us. Violence in our streets frightens us. This world is becoming uglier each day, and those who could help pass us by on the other side. So take your pick...too often we are the robbers in the story; more often we are the Priest and Levite; and every day we are the man dying in the road.

But along comes a Samaritan. A man hated by Jews, and yet he stops and helps the dying man who is a Jew. He has compassion. He pours on wine to disinfect his wounds. He pours on oil to soothe his wounds. He puts him on his own animal. He takes him to an inn and stays with him. He cares for him the rest of that day and through the night. And as he leaves, he gives money to the innkeeper...enough to care for the man until he is well; and upon his return, the Samaritan promises to repay the innkeeper for whatever more he spends on the man.

Are you and I that Samaritan? We call him the *Good Samaritan*, don't we? And the Bible clearly says that "no one is good except God." Jesus is the Good Samaritan because He alone is full of compassion, and He alone is the One who stops to save us in our dying condition. If we are the Good Samaritan, then we are able to save ourselves. But we're not. We are the ones in need of saving, in need of forgiveness, and mercy, and compassion.

Jesus, like the Samaritan in the parable, is hated by the Jews; so much so that they put Him to death on a cross. Jesus, like the Samaritan in the story, has the oil and wine of His Word and Sacraments which He pours out upon us to cleanse us of our sins and heal our brokenness. Jesus, like the Samaritan in our story, takes you to His inn, and here in His church, He charges the innkeeper to take care of you until He returns.

A question we must ponder is this: Who is the victim in the story? We know that it's not the robbers, nor are the Priest and Levite victims. The wounded man, we say...he is the victim. But we are wrong. Oh, he is victimized. First by the robbers, and then by the Priest and Levite. But consider what it means to be a victim. Everything is taken, and nothing good is received. The victim loses whatever he has, and gains

nothing in return. And thus, the wounded man cannot be the victim in the story, for he receives much - all the care and help he could ever hope to receive from the Good Samaritan.

Who is the victim? The Good Samaritan is the victim, for he is the only one who loses what he has, and gains nothing in return. But he does this freely. He willingly, out of his heart of compassion, becomes the victim. He was not attacked by the robbers, yet he gives up his time, his oil and wine, and his money on behalf of the one who was attacked. In this way he is exchanging places with the wounded man. He restores to him what was taken from him by the robbers. And so he, this Samaritan, in effect becomes the one who is robbed, beaten, and left to die.

And this is exactly what Jesus has done for you. His heart is full of compassion. And so He does not pass you by. He stops, He comes to you. He sees that you are mortally wounded; that Satan has victimized you. But He also sees that you and I are not without fault in this. For as Satan has done to us, so we have done to others.

But our Good Samaritan does not come to punish. He comes to help, to rescue, to forgive. He comes to be, for you, Himself the victim. And so Jesus takes your place. He kneels down and allows Himself to be stripped, and beaten, and left to die on a cross. He becomes wounded for you. He takes your place in death. But in doing so, He raises you up and cares for you here in the church, His inn. He lovingly pours out upon you His oil and wine, so that through these holy vessels of Word and Sacrament, you are given life. And everything that Satan took from you is restored to you in full.

This is the meaning of the parable to him who is Christ-centered; who lives with his eye on the Gospel. And so the lawyer in our text, who tests Jesus, simply does not get it. "*What must I do,*" he asks, "*to inherit eternal life?*" "Go and be the Good Samaritan," Jesus tells him. But he would fail, as we all would. For we are not good. Our hearts are full of sin, not compassion.

The Good Samaritan can live out His life through us. He can help and rescue others through us. And He does. When you help another; when you pour on the oil and wine, it's Jesus working in and through you. And so you are good samaritans with a small "g" and a small "s." But Jesus is the Good Samaritan with a capital "G" and a capital "S." When we help others, it's never out of a pure motive. Sin is mixed in with all the good we do. But Jesus, the true Good Samaritan, only has pure motives. He gives everything to you purely out of mercy. He forgives you...everyone of you He forgives, purely from His heart of compassion. We cannot save ourselves no matter how good we are to others; for all the good we do is not from us; it's from Jesus. He, our Good Samaritan, saves us from sin, death, and hell, and through us He is good also to others.

I'm glad the lawyer asked Jesus his question, for in doing so, Jesus gave us the parable of the Good Samaritan. But the lawyer was asking the wrong question. It's not "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" It's "What has Jesus done for me to give me eternal life?" He became your Good Samaritan. That's the answer. And that's the answer Jesus wanted this lawyer to learn in time.

So yes, go now and live as good samaritans to others. Not to gain heaven in doing so, for eternal life is already yours in your Baptism into Christ. The oil and wine have given you life. You live as a good samaritan because Jesus lives in you. And He who has forgiven you, and saved you eternally, is the One who will be the Good Samaritan through you to others. Amen.