

## Luke 10:25-37

In a Christmas pageant, the parts which are the most desired by children are typically those parts with the most action. It's more fun to be a magi than an innkeeper. The innkeeper just stands there and says, "No room for you;" but the magi travel from the farthest end of the church bringing their gifts to the baby Jesus. There's a lot more action in that role.

Were we to celebrate "Christmas in July" today, having a sort of pageant, we could use our Gospel reading for today--the parable of the Good Samaritan. If this story were acted out by the children, which parts do you suppose would be most desired? Perhaps not the Priest or the Levite. They just pass by rather quickly. But the Good Samaritan...the kids would want to be that character. The innkeeper--again, he just stands there in the story. But the robbers--even though they're bad men, kids would eat up that role; they get to beat up the man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho.

What about you? Which character is the one you would take? But let's answer honestly. Not, which part do you want, but which part do you resemble? Who are you in the story? How do you see yourself? And we should also ask, How does God see you? Which of the characters does He want you to be?

Certainly not those awful robbers. Selfish, greedy, caring nothing about their fellowman, they with evil intention, waited for a traveler to pass by. Then they jumped out from their hiding spot and took everything away from him, even his clothes which were highly valued in those days. And when he resisted, they beat him up and left him half-dead on the road.

Is this you in the story? No hands please. But then I doubt whether I needed to say that. Who of us would liken our self to those awful robbers? I mean, really...they're the worst of the worst. But if you search your own heart you're going to find that same selfishness, that same greed, that same "I couldn't care less" attitude toward your fellowman. This does not mean that you and I ever lie in wait to rob and beat up other people on the road from Augusta to Washington. But have you ever acted in selfishness? Has greed ever caused you to act in a sinful manner? Have you ever treated your neighbor in an unkind way which brought hurt and pain to him or her? You and I are closer to the part of those robbers than we might think or want to admit.

Now the Priest and the Levite have roles which are really the same. They see the dying man, yet they do not stop. They offer no help whatsoever. Is this perhaps you in the story? It's true, isn't it, that almost daily you and I resemble those men. They committed sins of omission. By their refusal to help they were just as guilty as the robbers were of breaking the Fifth Commandment. Whenever we neglect our neighbor's needs; whenever we could help someone whom God has set before us, but we pass by on the other side, we become the Priest and Levite in the story. Whenever we withhold our offerings; whenever we let the plate pass us by, giving little to nothing, we like the Priest and Levite, fail to be people through whom God could work for the welfare of our neighbor.

Now I think it's true that we would much prefer to see ourselves as the Good Samaritan. We tend to minimize the times in our life when we act like the robbers, the Priest, or the Levite, but we are quick to point out when we are a Good Samaritan to our neighbor. We sleep better at night when we dwell upon all the ways in which we have done good to others in need of our help.

But allow me to take away your halo; to burst your bubble and bring you crashing down to the ground. Not one of you, nor I, are Good Samaritans. We're not even close. Nor does God want you

to be a Good Samaritan. When Jesus told the lawyer to go and do likewise, He wanted him to learn firsthand that he was a failure at being the Good Samaritan.

The only Good Samaritan is Jesus. He was despised and hated just as all Samaritans were by the Jews. He did not pass by on the other side, but did everything which was needed to help, to save His neighbor. God does not want you to see yourself as the Good Samaritan in the story. If you do, then you are a Pharisee. You're like that lawyer who did not know the first thing about inheriting eternal life because he thought it involved some heroic act that he must do. He thought his own actions would get him into heaven. You and I are not the Good Samaritan. "There is no one who is good," says the Bible. We are all sinful and corrupt.

Who are you in the story? You are the man who was beaten up and robbed. Satan did this to you. "You were born dead in your trespasses and sins," says the Bible. As the man lay on the road half-dead, robbed of everything, so is that true of us. Born in sin, robbed of innocence, an enemy of God just as Jews were of Samaritans...you and I had nothing when God found us. No one else could help. All the world can only pass us by on the other side. There is no one who can save us from hell. Not even the rules and regulations of the church. Tithing every year, serving on the church council, treating our neighbor in the kindest way...as the Priest and Levite passed by without stopping to help, so must every religion which says that eternal life is something you must earn; so must all our feeble attempts to keep the Law. All our works of service to God and our fellowman must all pass by quickly on the other side. They cannot save us from death and eternal destruction.

The only one who can help is the Good Samaritan. And He does. I don't know all of your backgrounds. I don't know your secret sins. I don't know your fears and failures. But I do know that you have a Good Samaritan. His name is Jesus. He sees you lying wounded in the road, dead in your trespasses and sins. He climbs off His donkey and goes to the cross for you. He allows that vicious robber, Satan, to strip Him of all that He has. He allows him to take away even His own life, for His life He gives to you. In your baptism He pours on you His healing oil and wine. He carries you to His church where He takes care of you with His Word and Sacraments. And He tells the innkeeper, your pastor, to take care of you preaching and teaching His words of life into you, until that great day when He shall return.

In the story only two of the characters did any action at all. The robbers acted and the Good Samaritan acted. The Priest and Levite did not act. The traveler was acted upon, first for evil, then for good. And that story is the way it is in life. Satan acts, and God acts. We are the recipients. Satan first acted out of hatred upon you. But now Jesus acts in compassion for you. What the robber took away, your Good Samaritan gives back to you...and so much more. Here in the inn, where Jesus has brought you, He will never stop pouring on you His rich blessings--His grace, His gifts, His forgiveness. Yes, His forgiveness...for you and I are not just innocent victims here. Like fools we travel the path from Jerusalem to Jericho where we know Satan is lurking. We do not stay clear of the robber's nest. We walk through life with reckless abandon and often, as a result, get beaten up by sin and Satan.

Jesus forgives you. He does not laugh and say, "You deserve what you get." He gives you what you do not deserve. He shows mercy toward you. Even though you were His enemy breaking His Commandments day after day, He forgives you of every sin. Even though you and I often act like the Priest and Levite, and even like those awful robbers, Jesus holds nothing against you. He forgives you completely.

And once you know this; once you believe this; once you admit the truth that you are not the Good Samaritan in the story, but that you are the man who was robbed and beaten, but now are grateful and thankful that Jesus, your Good Samaritan, has acted for you--then He, day after day, acts through you. You are not the Good Samaritan, but the Good Samaritan lives within you and through you. So now, as a recipient of His love and mercy, you will be a Good Samaritan to others because it is Jesus living His life through you. You can serve on the council, you can tithe with your offerings, you can be kind to your neighbor, not to inherit eternal life by being a Good Samaritan, but because you have a Good Samaritan who has saved you from sin, death, and hell, and He now lives within your thankful heart. Amen.