

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
8th Sunday after Pentecost
14 July 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 10:25-37

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

In 1518 Dr. Luther presented a series of theses to the Augustinian friars in Heidelberg, Germany.

He was supposed to play nice.
Ever since the previous year's 95 Theses, the Pope had it out for him.
But Luther had a hard time playing nice.

The first thesis said,
*"The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life,
cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him."*

In that one thesis alone, Luther strips man of anything and everything he would give to God.
Of course evil works were evil works;
no one thought those could help make things right with God.

However, the common thought was—and still is today—if I just do enough good, then I'll be set.

And how do we know what the good is that we're supposed to do?
Well, the Law, of course!

Our Old Testament reading today says,
*"You shall therefore keep My statutes and My rules;
if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord."* (Lev 18:5)

So the Law is fairly simple: just do as the Lord commands and all will be well.
And if you're unsure what the His will is, what He wants you to do, how to live, and so forth—
then simply look at the Law, the 10 Commandments; everything can be found there.

Now, it only makes sense that we try to keep this Law, right?
It only makes sense that we give it our best, that we do as much as we're able,
and surely God will fill in the gaps, supply what we lack, and finish the job.

That's the way the lawyer thought who came to test Jesus today,
"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 10:25)

That is, "I've worked and worked and now, what do I lack?"

The man asked a Law question: *what must I do.*
So, Jesus gives him a Law answer:
"What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (10:26)

As expected, the lawyer is well-versed in the Law and rightly summarizes all 10 Commandments
as a command to love God and neighbor.

Jesus very simply says, “*Yes; do this, and you will live.*” (10:28)

This made the lawyer look like a fool.

Everyone knows the Law—it’s written on our hearts!

We call it a conscience.

And though some consciences have taken a beating in today’s world, we each have one.

Each of us knows by nature not to kill or steal or despise our neighbor’s name, goods, and wife.

So Jesus simply told him what everyone already knows.

He treated the lawyer like a child asking about the catechism.

So, trying to test Jesus again—

and justifying his question, making it more profound than it really is—
he says, “*And who is my neighbor?*” (10:29)

The lawyer is trying to pull Jesus away from the Word given by Moses.

He wants Him to slip up, to speak apart from the Scriptures.

At the same time, the lawyer wants to make sure he’s done what’s good and right,
deserving of eternal life.

He wants to reach God by the Law.

Luther says you can’t do that.

What’s more, Luther says that the Law not only fails to make you right with God,
but in fact it hinders you.

Trying to do good,
trying to keep the Law,
trying to love both God and neighbor,
actually makes things worse!

The Law gets in your way.

It’s a wall, a barrier, you can’t get over it, run around it, or pretend it’s not there.

The Law attacks you, it crushes you, and ultimately, this Law kills you.

Jesus knows this.

The lawyer doesn’t.

The lawyer is stuck under the Law—

under his own works and will and power and glory.

The lawyer needs to prove himself, measure himself, and justify himself before God.

But Jesus doesn’t.

To answer his question about the neighbor, Jesus tells him the parable of the Good Samaritan.

You’ve heard it before.

But maybe you've only heard it in the way of the Law.
 Maybe you've only considered the Good Samaritan as an example for you to follow.
 Maybe you've only heard it as a story about helping the poor and the weak and the down-trodden.

But what if it's not actually about the Law?
 What if it's not about you?
 What if—get ready now—*what if it's about Jesus?*

You've got a man going on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho.
 A band of robbers strip him, beat him, and leave him half dead.
 A priest walked by and just kept going, so also the Levite.
 But then came a Samaritan who had *compassion*.
 He bound his wounds, set him on his own animal, brought him to the inn and paid for his care.
 If that wasn't enough, he'd pay more when he returned.

Now, the man in this parable who fell among robbers is the lawyer.
 The robbers are the demons and lusts and temptations of our fallen nature.
 The priest and the Levite are the Law—no help at all to the fallen man.
 The Samaritan, the rejected outsider, the unlikely friend and neighbor—well that's Jesus.

So when Jesus turns and asks the lawyer,
 “*Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell?*” (10:36)

The lawyer understood: “*The one who showed him mercy*” (10:37).

The lawyer won't utter the word, *Samaritan*—
 and he might not get that it's all about Jesus—
 but what he knows now is mercy, which the Law cannot give.

And notice the way Jesus asked the question at the end:
 He didn't say that the fallen man was the neighbor to the Samaritan,
 but He said that the Samaritan was the neighbor to the fallen man.

So it's not a parable about loving the fallen and broken,
 but about the fallen and broken recognizing Jesus, and loving Him.

What this means is that the lawyer, who knows that he's to love God
with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind,
and your neighbor as yourself—
 is now to recognize that his neighbor is *Jesus*.

Jesus is the Good Samaritan.
 Jesus shows mercy.
 Jesus has compassion—we've seen the Greek here before: *splangkna*, where we get *spleen*.
 Jesus' insides ache for the fallen, for the lawyer, for *you*.

His heart aches for those that would try to make things right by the Law—
by their works and will and anything that comes from them.

He is the neighbor to us apart from the Law.
He picks up our broken and wounded and dying bodies and casts them on His beast of burden.
He takes our sorrows and cares and gives us His yoke.
He heals and feeds and nourishes and provides.
And above all, He forgives.

And He does it all by *grace*, for free, not by what we deserve, not according to our works.

He did it all for the lawyer, and He does it all for you.

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,
for His steadfast love endures forever. (Ps 136:1)*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit