

Sermon for September 14th, 2025
THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

2 Chronicles 28:8-15

8 The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters. They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. **9** But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, “Behold, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. **10** And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the LORD your God? **11** Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.”

12 Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war **13** and said to them, “You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the LORD in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.” **14** So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. **15** And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them. They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.

Psalms 32

1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

5 I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

6 Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

7 You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,

which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Galatians 3:15-22

15 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. **16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. **17** This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. **18** For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. **20** Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. **22** But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Luke 10:25-37

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **26** He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" **27** And he answered, "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." **28** And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" **30** Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. **31** Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. **32** So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. **34** He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' **36** Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" **37** He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Our text for meditation this Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

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

"Lawyering" with Jesus

Today I'd like to focus on the lawyer's question, one which our Savior does not answer. Not his first question regarding eternal life. Christ answers that very easily; if you would live, obey the Law perfectly. Love God above all, and love your neighbor as yourself. Simply do all this perfectly from the moment of your birth up to the point where you shed your mortal coil, and then eternal life is yours. The judaizers among us love Christ's answer to this first question – "what shall I do to inherit eternal

life” – because they are deluded, thinking that Christ gives means it is possible for a normal person to truly love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves.

The second question the lawyer asks shows us why we cannot hope to get to Heaven this way. He asks “And who is my neighbor?” This is the question asked by every man who does not want to love his neighbor. It is the question asked by those who have not been loving their neighbors. Because they have not loved their neighbors as themselves, and because they do not want to love their neighbors as themselves, these wretched souls do what the lawyer did, lawyering with Jesus to try to find some escape clause in God's contract with mankind – His immutable, eternal Law.¹

You might have someone in mind when I describe this sort of person. Maybe you have interacted with someone who saw the high-profile murders that happened this week, and they excused the killings for one reason or another. To them, these victims did not *count* as a neighbor. Many of the people who expressed antipathy to these victims call themselves Christian. They are exactly like the lawyer trying to excuse his atrophied heart. But it is not just failure to have sympathy for murder victims that makes people ask “who is my neighbor.” We see it happen whenever a Christian passes by a beggar, a homeless person asking for food, whenever they judge others to be beneath their compassion.

It would be easy for me to leave it at that. It would be so easy for us to thumb our noses at people who refuse to treat their neighbors with dignity, respect and compassion wouldn't it? We would feel so, so righteous if we left it there and called it a day. But we should be humble here. If we were honest with ourselves we would admit that we *all* do this. We all play the lawyer with God from time to time, seeking some “out” that would justify our selfish behavior. A mother might have a bad day where she is not attentive to the needs of her children; while they cry and she ignores them, lazily spending her time on the phone, she tells herself and God that she is suffering from burnout and the kids will be fine. An employee at a store might be rude to a customer, but he will justify his dismissive behavior by saying to himself and to God that the customer wasn't a regular anyway. In our reading, the lawyer asking this question seeks to *justify* himself for his refusal to walk the path of charity and compassion for others. We all do the same thing, and just like the lawyer we have no excuse.

How Christ Answers the Lawyer

This is why Christ does not answer him directly. Make no mistake beloved, Christ does *not* tell the man who his neighbor is. He does not open up a dictionary and read the entry of “neighbor.” He does not open a Greek lexicon and tell the lawyer “well you see, the very word πλησίον, transliterated 'Plesion' is properly defined as countryman, friend, or person in close proximity to yourself. Dear lawyer you answered your own question.”² He does not limit neighbors to ethnic kin, or else His own parable would make no sense. Nor does he expand the word “neighbor” to mean every human being on earth – to say *that* would make the word meaningless. If everyone is my neighbor, no one is. Telling me to love everyone equally means telling me that love is a meaningless idea.

So Christ does not tell him who his neighbors are. But He *does* answer the lawyer with a message that the lawyer – and all of *us* need to hear. You see, *who* is your neighbor does not matter. Christ did not define the term, so neither will I. What is more important is, who are you a neighbor to? The Samaritan in His parable went out of his way to help someone in need. The Samaritan saw someone in need who wasn't receiving help, and so he bound his wounds up. The priest and the Levite could not touch a possibly-dead body or else they would be unclean and could not do their God-given duty. But the Samaritan, like the lawyer, was no priest nor Levite – and if he is neither of those things, he has no excuse to avoid doing the neighborly thing.

That is Christ's message to *you* beloved. Who is your neighbor? Who cares! What we should be asking is, how can *we* be neighbors to others? Do you have a duty to God or to closer neighbors that

1 If any lawyers are reading this homily, I don't assume that all of you do this.

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4139.htm>

keeps you from helping that poor man? No? Then help him! Are you putting yourself in immanent danger if you express condolences to that poor family whose father was murdered? No? Then show your compassion! In a world where so many people are making excuses and justifying themselves before God, our Lord Christ tells the lawyer and all of us to *be* the neighbor instead of asking “who is my neighbor.”

The Core Message

To be a neighbor to someone, as our Savior puts it, is to be like Christ. The parable of the Good Samaritan is clearly an allegory for what our Lord Jesus did for us. He saw us paralyzed in trespasses and sins, victimized by the world and the flesh and the devil, on our way to eternal death. He had compassion on us, and took us when no one else would – especially not the Law, symbolized here by the priest and Levite. Just as the Samaritan pours out wine to treat the man's wounds, so too did Christ pour out His precious Blood upon us that we may be healed. And just as the Samaritan promises to return, presumably to take the poor victim back home, so too does Christ promise His Return someday to take us to Paradise. And the victimized man was unable to save himself; Christ is our Savior, knowing full well that we shall never, so long as we live on this earth, love God and neighbor as we ought.

Jesus did this all for us without asking which of us was His neighbor. In fact, He went to the Cross willingly, knowing that all of us were His enemies before we became Christians. He tells us with this parable, saying “go and do likewise,” to say that we too must be willing to show neighborly, Agape love towards everyone we meet and know so long as it is within our power to do it. Not that we must *die* for our neighbors necessarily, and not that we are barred from defending ourselves when attacked, but rather the Golden Rule – to do unto others as you would have others do unto you – is established here as a means of being like Christ. Let us do so beloved, for Christ first showed this love to us.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.