July 13, 2025 – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Pastor David Matthews

 **Dearly Beloved Saints in Christ,**

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

Our text for our meditation today comes from the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter ten—the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

A lawyer approaches Jesus to test Him, asking, ***“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*** In response, Jesus tells a story—not just to answer the question, but to reveal something deeper. Through this parable, Jesus shows the lawyer and us that eternal life is not something we earn. It must be given. We need a Savior to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The man on the road represents all of us: broken, half-dead, unable to rescue ourselves. Jesus tells this story not simply to encourage kindness, but to proclaim the **doctrine of justification**—that we are made right with God not by our own efforts, but by His mercy.

In the story, a despised outsider the Samaritan rescues a man beaten and left for dead. This Samaritan is a picture of Jesus Himself. He owes us nothing, yet He comes in mercy to save us. We cannot repay Him. But we don’t have to since He gives to us freely. That is grace.

Justification, being declared righteous before God, comes by grace through faith. Faith doesn’t trust in our good works or intentions; it clings to the promises of God in Christ. Through faith, we receive Jesus and all His benefits, including the Holy Spirit. This faith transforms us. Though we were unrighteous, we now stand before God as righteous and as an unblemished lamb. And having been rescued, we’re called to follow Christ, not to earn salvation, but to live as His redeemed people.

This is the heart of Christianity: Christ alone is good, Christ alone is Savior, Christ alone saves by grace. He gives what we could never earn. This gives us peace, joy, and hope.

But when this message is misunderstood, when we think we must earn God’s favor, it burdens our conscience and robs us of the Gospel’s comfort. The parable of the Good Samaritan is often twisted into a simple call to "do more good." That’s not entirely wrong, but it's dangerously incomplete. A half-truth can be more harmful than a full lie.

The parable does call us to love our neighbor. But if we hear only that, we’ll end up condemned, overwhelmed, and discouraged. The devil takes that opportunity to whisper, “You haven’t done enough. You aren’t good enough. You’re no Samaritan.” But that’s a lie.

Jesus didn’t tell this parable just to say, “Be nice.” He told it to show that *He* is the true Good Samaritan. He is the merciful one who finds us in our helpless state, binds our wounds, pays our debt, and brings us into safety. The lawyer’s question—***“Who is my neighbor?”***—misses the point. Jesus is saying, “**I am your neighbor.** I am the one who rescues you.” And after the rescue, Jesus says, *“****Go and do likewise.”***

That is not a threat or demand for repayment—it’s the loving call of a Father to His children. Good works from a Christian matter. They are not optional. But they are never the cause of our salvation. They flow from it.

Salvation is by grace alone, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The law is fulfilled. God’s wrath is satisfied. Your debt is paid. You are sons and daughters now, with a place in His Kingdom. And He gives you work to do—not to earn His love, but to reflect it.

Scripture is full of these calls to live righteously: ***“Go and do likewise,” “Keep the commandments,” “Love your neighbor.”*** These commands are not to earn salvation, but because salvation has already been given. As Jeremiah says, ***“I will write my law on their hearts.”*** As Paul says, ***“Do we make void the law through faith? Certainly not! We establish the law.”*** Faith doesn’t abolish the law—it fulfills it through love.

Justification changes us. It doesn’t leave us static. When God forgives, He also renews. The Spirit gives us holy desires—to love, to serve, to confess, to endure, to imitate Christ. The lawyer was changed by meeting Jesus—just like the woman caught in adultery, Zacchaeus, and the man born blind. That is what grace does: it transforms.

Only after we are justified by faith does true obedience begin. We pray for help—to believe, to resist temptation, to love, to endure trials. And we trust that the Spirit dwells in us, giving us new hearts and holy desires.

None of this is possible apart from Christ. We cannot keep the law without Jesus. We cannot love without His Spirit. But when we believe, these good works become a gift—not a burden. As Jesus says, “Stay with Me. Work in My vineyard.”

The lawyer came to test Jesus, but beneath his motives was a sincere question: *How can I be justified?* The answer was not a loophole, but a Person. Jesus gave Himself.

Jesus is the One who shows mercy. He binds our wounds. He carries us. He pays our debts. He promises to return. He is the neighbor we all need.

And having been rescued by Him, we are called to be like Him—merciful, compassionate, forgiving. Not to earn heaven, but because heaven has already been given.

**In the Name of Jesus. Amen.**