

Luke 10:25-37, Leviticus 18:1-5
Pentecost 5C
July 14, 2019

We're Rescued Rescuers

Grace and peace to you and peace from God our Father. Amen.

The temple scholar and lawyer asked, **(Luke 10:29)** *"And who is my neighbor?"* It's easy to think this is the key question today's gospel lesson. It is an important question, but the key question is the one the lawyer asked to begin his conversation with Jesus, **(Luke 10:25)** *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

The lawyer isn't unusual ... it's a question some of us have. And Jesus has an answer for us ... *"What's the Law say? It's written right there for all to see and read."* And many of us can answer along with the lawyer, *"Love God ... love my neighbor."* To which Jesus responds, *"You got it ... love God and love your neighbor ... now **(Luke 10:28)** 'Do this, and you will live.'"*

For the lawyer and his fellow temple goers, the law, found in the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Torah, was the way of life. And it is, God says, **(Leviticus 18:4b-5)** *"I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD."* And this was true in Moses day, when God first said it. It was true in the lawyer's day, when he spoke with Jesus. It's true today also ... and it'll be true until Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead ...

The lawyer's problem, the problem many had, and the problem many today still have is this ... they forgot God called them His people by GRACE through faith ... not because they earned it following the law. God called Israel His people long before He gave them the Law. He called them His people when He called Abraham, a pagan who worshiped the ancient idols of his time, to be the father of His great nation Israel. By God's grace, through faith, Abraham accepted God's call and followed Him. No law was given at the time. Today, God has called each of us in

the same way ... not because we're such great people ... though I'm sure many of us really are. God called each of us ... by His grace to receive the gift of faith in His Son Jesus in our baptisms. Even still ... we, like the lawyer and many around us, can forget this great gift from our Father.

If we could ask the lawyer, *"If you died tonight, where would you be and why?"* I'm guessing he'd answer like many around us, and even some of us would answer. He'd answer, *"I'd be in heaven because I've been a good person. I've obeyed the law."* You see, the law was misused by the lawyer ... and by many throughout history ... as a recipe book to earn salvation.

The lawyer was pleased Jesus agreed with him. But, had another question, *"Thanks Jesus. I was wondering if you could clear things up a bit. I'm still unclear on this neighbor thing. Who is my neighbor?"* His question sounds reasonable. But when you think about it, it implies that some people aren't his neighbor. He could ask it like this, *"Jesus, who should I exclude from my love? Who would you exclude from your love?"* Jesus knows the lawyer's heart ... the thoughts in his mind. He knows this man of the law, steeped in the Old Testament scriptures would think, *"I can exclude from my love anyone who's unclean ... those ignorant of the law ... sinners ... gentiles ... Samaritans. In fact, it's God-pleasing to show hatred and intolerance to these outsiders who openly defile God's commandments through their belief and behavior."*

So, Jesus tells the story of the *Good Samaritan* ... one many of us are pretty familiar with. As Jesus tells the story, he expects the lawyer to put himself into the story somewhere ... so, I ask you, put yourself into the story. Where do you see yourself in this tale?

Do you see yourself as the priest or Levite? A pastor, worship assistant, faithful supporter and regular attender of worship in those days. They were leaders and active members of the synagogue ... pillars of the community. In order to support their families, community, and the

synagogue itself, it was important to remain so. People relied on them. Tending to the needs of a victim at the side of the road would cause them to become unclean, unable to support their families, community, and the synagogue. In the big picture, it'd be easier to let the man lie there.

Do you see yourself in the Samaritan? The outsider ... hated by the community, yet eager to help. Willing to sacrifice for a stranger laying by the roadside. Using his own oil, wine, and garments to soften, anesthetize, and bind up the man's wounds. Giving up his comfort by having his beast of burden carry the man. Giving up his own wealth, generously paying two months wages as a down payment for and promising to pay whatever else is needed for a full recovery.

Or how about ... the man himself? Do you see yourself as the man, helplessly lying by the side of the road ... mortally wounded and left for dead? We're mortally wounded all of us ... perhaps it by the sins of those in the world against us. Sins that've cut us deeply, causing pain and suffering. Sins we can't forgive. Or maybe we're mortally wounded by our own sins against others. These sins which wound us might include those described for us today in God's Word.

Insecurity, self-indulgence, or materialism causing us to keep whatever we get our hands on, at the expense of the poor, even if it's more than we can possibly consume on our own.

Using God's name, or some other clever words and rationale, to justify taking advantage of another to get what we covet in our hearts ... to put down another or build up ourselves.

Standing at the watercooler ... or on the playground ... or in the grocery store ... or on Facebook ... listening on as others tear down a coworker or acquaintance ... judging them with gossip, slander, and lies without defending them in any way.

Harboring a grudge against someone for years ... maybe even forgetting what caused the grudge in the first place ... holding onto hate and anger without letting go through forgiveness.

We may not have been robbed, beaten within inches of our life ... but, because of sin ... ours and others' ... we lie mortally wounded by the side of the road. Helpless. Left for dead.

Mortally wounded by our sin ... the sins of others against us ... God our Father says, **(Ezekiel 33:11)** *“As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”* Our Father in heaven desires to bind up all those who are wounded and do whatever He can to restore them to full health. And so, He sent His Son, Jesus, the Good Samaritan, into the world to rescue it from the effects of sin which brings eternal death ... sins committed against us and sins we commit against others.

Jesus Christ, came into His Father's creation, born of a woman, not to rule, but to rescue us from the eternal effects of sin which leave us helplessly, hopelessly, and mortally wounded by the side of the road ... left for dead. Giving up the comforts of His kingdom, He comes to our aid. He gives all He has to rescue us from the hopeless predicament we find ourselves in.

He was arrested. His freedom stolen away as He prayed to His Father. Injustice rained down on Him in the temple court. They falsely accused Him for claiming to be God, men slandered Him ... lied about Him. They sentenced Him to death ... taking away His innocent life.

On the cross, Jesus cursed and mocked. He was wounded by the sins of others and spikes pounded through His wrists and feet. Left hanging for dead, Jesus repaid their hate with ... not vengeance or violence ... but with love. He said, **(Luke 23:34)** *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* And He died. By His wounds, our wounds caused by sin are healed.

Three days later, rising to new life, Jesus defeated the power of sin and death. By His resurrection, Jesus binds up the wounds, carries to rest, and restores all who call on Him in faith.

We're all mortally wounded. All left for dead by the side of road. However, in Baptism, God's Word and promise combines with water to rescue all of us. He cleanses our wounds and

binds them up. He has rescued us from sure death ... and restored us to eternal life ... not because we're worthy in any way, but only because of His love for us. We are forgiven our sins – self-inflicted wounds. As we're forgiven by Him, He encourages us to forgive those who've wounded us.

I began today asking, **(Luke 10:25)** *“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* The answer, believe in Jesus, the Word made Flesh. Trust the Word of Life who has already bound up your wounds and paid to restore your life to wholeness. In faithful response to His love for you, as He's called you in Baptism, live as a trusting child of God heeding His call, **(Leviticus 18:4b-5)** *“I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.”* Let God work through you, His rescued child, to rescue still more of our neighbors, that they may also live.

God's grace be with you. Amen.

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