

Pentecost 5-July 10, 2022 (Laynee Lou Questad's baptism)

West Nidaros Lutheran Church

Luke 10:25-37

"Good? Samaritan" - Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

You likely have heard this parable many times. You have come to know this story Jesus told as the parable of the ...Good Samaritan. For many of us, it is the most familiar of the many parables that Jesus taught. Even someone who has never darkened the doorway of a church has heard this story somewhere and could tell you most of the details that Jesus describes in this parable. There are many differences between state laws, however, all 50 states in the US agree with one aspect of this parable and have a "Good Samaritan" law on their books. Originally, this law was put in place to protect physicians from civil damages when aiding someone they encounter along the road while they were working outside of their medical settings. But this law has been expanded further to protect anyone who attempts to provide care for a neighbor without fear of being sued. Yes, the Good Samaritan has made quite a name for himself. Every version of the bible I study from has the heading "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" to entitle this parable. If you google, Good Samaritan, it credits Jesus for calling the Samaritan who did so many things for this man who was beaten and left for half dead as... good. But I challenge you to find anywhere in this parable where Jesus adds the modifier "good" to the man who stopped and cared for the neighbor left to die. I am not suggesting that there is something terribly wrong by describing this helpful man as good, but we also must be careful not to put Jesus to the test as the lawyer did by hoping our goodness is the key to eternal life.

Making this move to focusing on the "goodness" of the Samaritan is just one of the many ways that this parable that Jesus taught has been changed from what Jesus intended it to teach. We must look at the first question that the lawyer asked to refocus our attention as to why Jesus told this parable. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The lawyer asks a great question. An important question. It is a question that every Confirmation Student should be able to answer before being confirmed. It is a question that each of you should be able to answer quickly. Jesus turns the question back on the lawyer to see how he reads and interprets the great two laws. The lawyer has the summary of the law on the tip of his tongue and recites it from memory back to Jesus. Love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. We don't know if the lawyer feels he has kept the first table of loving God perfectly since he doesn't ask any more questions about his love for God. But

there seems to be some question in the mind of the lawyer if he has loved his neighbor enough to inherit eternal life.

This is not the only time that Jesus is asked this important question about inheriting eternal life. Just a few chapters later after this parable, Luke records that a ruler came to Jesus to ask the exact same question, except this ruler begins by addressing Jesus as “**Good** Teacher” to which Jesus responds back to him by saying, “Why do you call me **good**? No one is good, but God only.” If Jesus declares that he isn’t good, we probably should think again before we focus on the goodness of the Samaritan as the main point of this parable.

In the case of the lawyer who came to test Jesus, he did not address Jesus as good, like the ruler did, and I would agree that Jesus did not do what I prefer to see in good teachers. I like teachers who simply give me the answers I am looking for. I recall my physics lab teacher at SDSU, an elderly retired professor. This lab was held on Friday afternoons. Friday afternoons were not the time of the week when I was interested in learning anything more. I just wanted to have the answers I needed to fill in the blanks on my lab report, so I could go home. I remember calling Dr. Lynch to our lab table and posing clever questions so he would give me the answers I wanted so I could move on with my weekend. Dr. Lynch seemed attentive as he listened to my question, but he never gave me the answers I wanted. He knew what I was up to, so he left me to wrestle with my questions and search for the answers.

Jesus also knew what the lawyer was up to and even though it sounds like Jesus gives the lawyer a high five for giving the right answer to the question, Jesus leaves a little room for the lawyer to struggle with his own answer. However, to this day, so many people believe the road to salvation is to become a **good** Samaritan by helping your neighbor in need who is left along the side of the road. Jesus is not wrong in agreeing with the lawyer’s response when he said, “Do this and you shall live.”, Jesus was telling the truth. If you could keep these two commandments completely, the gates of heaven would swing wide open for you. The lawyer himself came up with one of the problems with this command of loving your neighbor himself, when he wanted to justify himself. In other words, he wanted to save himself, so he wanted to clarify which neighbors he was to love to be sure he had loved enough and the right neighbors. This is when Jesus tells the parable of the Samaritan.

Jesus never tells a parable so that everyone will understand what he is saying. Jesus taught using parables to elect people to his kingdom who were willing to listen to him from those who sought another way to inherit eternal life. The lawyer’s question to Jesus about which neighbors to love was redirected by Jesus from the person in need to the one who showed mercy. Jesus tested the lawyer to distinguish between loving and showing mercy. Then Jesus then gives this testing lawyer another command by telling him to “Go and do likewise”. This lawyer’s question about salvation was never answered with good news. Jesus

ended his conversation with the lawyer with two more commands. Go and do likewise. This left the lawyer uncertain of his salvation by wondering where to go and how much he must do.

I pray that each of you know better than the way of your salvation is up to you to do a good deed when and wherever you can. If my salvation depends on what I do, the gates of heaven would have been shut for me this week. A vehicle was abandoned on the side of our road early this week. I justified myself for passing by this vehicle that seemed half dead along the road because I didn't know who left this unfamiliar vehicle there. The vehicle was unfamiliar and so was the person who I saw the next day with his head under the hood and an alternator in his hand. It looked like he had a ride and had things under control, so after I looked, I passed on by. The vehicle is now gone and so is my guilty conscience of not being a "good Samaritan" however, I did nothing. I looked and passed by just like the Levite and the priest.

You have not come here today to test Jesus; you are here to hear the good news that Jesus has for you. I will not give you a parable to confuse you or give you a command that I doubt you can do. The answer I like the best from confirmation students to the lawyer's question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" is "Nothing". There is nothing that you can do. You can't justify or save yourself. Jesus has done all of this work for you. And since Jesus has already done this work, we might as well proclaim this promise to the children of God as early as possible. Laynee Lou will soon be given this promise of eternal life through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. But after she is baptized, what must she do to keep the promise of eternal life? Once again, nothing. Laynee will return to this place because she has received the Holy Spirit and before long, she too will come up to listen to children's sermons with her sisters and go to Sunday School and Confirmation and will one day answer the lawyer's question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and she will say, "Eternal life has been given to me. This will be the greatest inheritance she will receive. I am certain of this because I know her family." One day, Laynee, like each of us, will take our last breath on earth, but this will be only a momentary rest before hearing your name to rise from your sleep and enter the kingdom of heaven. Your name that was written on a baptismal certificate was more importantly written in heaven. Only names are written in this book. Thankfully, for you and me, there are no deeds that we have done or failed to do written in this book. I am thankful that Jesus will not be asking me about the white vehicle that was parked on 471st Ave this week that I failed to help.

The good news and this is indeed "**good**" news for you, salvation is yours not by what you must do, but what Jesus has done for you by his death and resurrection. Amen