

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10)
St. Luke 10:25-37

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In Matthew 25, Jesus presented a picture of the Day of Judgment. People will be separated, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep on Jesus' right hand will be ushered into everlasting life as Jesus gives a list of their accomplishments, much to their surprise. The goats on Jesus' left will be ushered into fire and everlasting torment prepared for the devil and his angels, and as much as the sheep are surprised to hear of what they have done, the goats are shocked to hear of what they didn't do.

From there, people get all kinds of ideas as regards what the text means. They all usually focus on the works of the sheep versus the non-works of the goats, and assume He is there teaching that His followers should be in works of service to others, feeding, clothing, visiting, and caring for them as befits their needs. These are all fine works, given to you by God that you may be in service to others.

But Jesus also said in Matthew 25, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40) Now, the idea of works to service to others shifts into one that states that doing these is doing them to Jesus, that the person receiving the benefit is something more than someone in the way of your getting to Jesus. It also shifts into the belief that these works are only worth doing if they are done to someone who is Christ-like—someone you deem to be a Christian.

This interpretation of Matthew 25 is completely counter to the text and supporting texts. Those of you who know me well know that I often teach Matthew 25 with support from Matthew 10; after all, Scripture interprets Scripture. In Matthew 10, Jesus prepared to send His 12 disciples out, telling them to take no provisions, that those who receive them will take care of them; in other words, they will be fed, clothed, visited, and cared for by those who receive them. This is much like He told the 72 earlier in Luke 10; in fact, He told the 12 and the 72 pretty much the same things. So, similar to what Jesus told the 72, He told His 12, "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." (Matthew 10:40) So, when Jesus said in Matthew 25, "[A]s you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me," He is saying the same thing. No one says such a thing of just any other person, but it is said of those who represent them—when a representative is received and cared for, it is as if the person who is being represented is received and cared for.

Regardless, the text in Matthew 25 is not about service to neighbor, but about the day of judgment. There will be more time to delve into that text some other time. No, if you want to hear Jesus teach you about works of service to neighbor, there is today's text.

Sadly, this text is often misinterpreted in as askew a fashion as is the text from Matthew 25. In today's text, Jesus told the story of a certain man, a Jew, beset upon by thieves who rob him, strip him, beat him, and leave him to die in the ditch along the side of the road. Other travelers happen upon him lying in the ditch—a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. The priest and Levite, fellow Jews, pass around the man on the other side of the road. They had good reason to do so, according to the Law: the man in his current condition is unclean, and had they helped him, they would have been unclean, too. The Samaritan, however, had compassion on the man, bound his wounds, placed him on his own animal, brought him to an inn to recover, and gave to the innkeeper all that he would need to care for the injured man, promising more if what was left was not enough.

Where do the interpretations go wrong? "The Samaritan is Jesus," they say, leaving no room for anything else, even if the text indicates otherwise. The Samaritan is Jesus, because His compassion causes Him not to be concerned about cleanness—He ate with sinners and tax collectors, after all. Furthermore, just as Jesus healed the world of the injury known as sin, so the Samaritan healed the

man of his own resources. The Samaritan brought the man to the inn; Jesus brings sinners into the Church. The Samaritan directed the innkeeper to care for the man; Jesus instructs pastors to care for His sheep. The Samaritan provided all that the innkeeper needed to care for the man; the sufficiency for your care from the pastor lies solely and completely in Christ your Lord.

This, they say, is all that this parable means, but that ignores the rest of the text.

A certain lawyer prompted Jesus to tell the story. This lawyer is not a courtroom counselor, but an expert in the law of God. If you had a question about what God's law said or demanded of you or the minute details of the law, you consulted a lawyer. So, for him to ask Jesus what the law says, what the detail of the law means, can only mean that he intended to test Jesus and catch him in a trap. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." "And who is my neighbor?"

The lawyer was going to prove his righteousness by demonstrating his love for his neighbor, but only the man who was worthy of his love was his neighbor.

Ah, you see! Works of service only matter if the neighbor is one who can be loved. Works of service can only be *tolerated* if the neighbor is one who can be loved. "One who can be loved," is such a subjective phrase. If I love you, at least in this moment, then I'll be more inclined to care for you and be charitable toward you. That's how many who misinterpret Matthew 25 think. That's how the lawyer thought. It is wrong!

After telling the story, Jesus turned to the lawyer and asked, "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" Despite what he wanted to believe, the lawyer was confronted with the truth. The priest and the Levite couldn't be bothered to be neighborly to the unclean man; the risk was too great—the work of service to him could not be tolerated. It was the one least expected to be a neighbor to the unclean man who was, a rival Samaritan.

So, the lawyer answered, "He who showed mercy on him." The lawyer couldn't even bring himself to say the word Samaritan. Nevertheless, he knew who the neighbor was.

"You go, and do likewise."

There is where you find difficulty. It's a fallen human frailty. No one wants to go out of their way to help someone they think is not deserving of their help. The lawyer was looking for confirmation of his bias. Instead, he received the opposite, but acknowledged his lesson.

The command he received is directed toward you, too. Have mercy on those who need mercy. Show grace to those in need of grace. Help the helpless. Do not regard their station in life or their relationship to you, should they be a friend or enemy. You are not doing this *to* Jesus, but you are doing it *because of* Him. As much as the Matthew 25 teaching is about the Day of Judgment, today's text is teaching you that your neighbor is anyone whom you meet for whom you can do one of the good works prepared in advance for you to walk in. (cf. Ephesians 2:10) Better yet, in keeping with the grammar of today's text, **you** are the neighbor when do you the good work to anyone in need of your good work.

Now, you'll note that I never called the story a parable; the only time I mentioned the term was in connection to others thinking of it this way. You'll note that Luke never used the term...that Jesus never used to term. No, it would be more accurate to refer to this as a fable—a moral story, much in the vein of Aesop's Fables. Jesus was, after all, answering a lawyer's question about interpreting the law—a moral question. That's why He closed out the story with the imperative to the lawyer and to you: "You go, and do likewise."

Others call Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan a parable. Even the editors of the Lutheran Study Bible allowed the section title with that word to remain above today's text—perhaps they had no choice in that regard—but the word also appears in the book's study notes. People call it a parable and want to interpret it as a parable, but a parable is a story about the Kingdom of God. There are certainly elements of a parable in this fable—He told this moral story that way by no accident, you can be sure, for He certainly intended for you to see a type of Christ in the Samaritan, for the very reasons mentioned in the interpretation of this text as a parable. You see, Jesus, similar to the Samaritan, stooped down into the ditch of your humanity, taking on flesh and blood like yours. By His work, your wounds are healed—by His stripes, you are healed. (cf. Isaiah 53:5) Jesus has done the work to bring you into the inn of the Church, wherein He gives all that you need in order to come to the fullness of life. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (John 10:10b)

This was accomplished for you on the tree of the cross, whereat Jesus shed His blood for your propitiation. You are covered in the blood of Christ, your Savior and Redeemer. This was applied to you each personally in your hearing of the Word and receiving of Holy Baptism. There, in those means, you were washed and sanctified, given new life, much as the man in the parable was restored to life by the work of the Samaritan and in the inn. And Jesus gives you all abundantly from Himself, body and blood, Word and work, so that you may have that abundantly life. Now, you are sent out from this inn to "go, and do likewise," and be a neighbor to your fellow man, each of you as you have been given according to your ability. You are sent out with the abundant life you have in Christ, a life which is yours because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.