



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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July 22, 2007

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 10:25-37

Pastor Keith Haag

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 25

Second Lesson: Colossians 1:1-14

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37

### Are We Good Samaritans?

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one that is very well known. Even the legislators of our land recognize it for they have passed Good Samaritan laws—laws to protect those who stop along the highway to help injured people from lawsuits that might be filed against them later. But knowing the Parable well does not necessarily mean that we live according to what it teaches, nor does it even mean that we fully understand all that it teaches. There are some people who say that the Good Samaritan teaches us the essence of Christianity—which is to love other people and help them. But we know that the essence of Christianity is to come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus and the salvation which he has provided for us. Our love for Jesus will flow from his love for us. The good works that we do will be fruits of the faith which the Holy Spirit gives us.

So when today we ask the question—are we Good Samaritans?—we need to understand the way in which the Bible uses the word “good.” So it is good to ask two other questions in order to try to answer that first one. How can we be good? And how can we do good? We know that the Lord Jesus was often asked questions that related to everyday life. People would come to him and say, what about this in life or how should I react when this happens?

So here, a man came to Jesus asking a question about eternity. He wanted to know how he could be sure that he would go to heaven one day. “Teacher,” he asked, “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Luke 10:25.) The question really involved a contradiction. We do not normally think that you earn an inheritance. An inheritance is simply given to you. No matter how hard you have worked, you cannot be sure that it will be given to you. But this man said “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” So you can see that he already had an idea of what the answer to the question should be. He believed that you should be able to be sure of heaven by something that you do. This man was quite sure that he was good. He believed he was good enough to please God himself. But he was not so sure about Jesus. Was Jesus a good teacher? He had asked the question specifically to test that. What kind of answer would Jesus give to the question—what must I do to inherit eternal life? If he thought that Jesus was going to give a very uncertain answer, he was greatly surprised. Jesus was led to ask some questions himself in order to lead the man to answer his own question. Jesus said to him, “You’re an expert in the Law. You have been learning the Commandments of God, the Law of God, all your life. What does it say there? What have you learned?” And the man was able to give the answer that he had learned. “*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, ’ Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Luke 10:27). The man gave what was really a complete summary of both tables of the Law.

In the first table, God asked us to love him perfectly with heart and soul and mind—with every ounce of strength that is in us. And in the second table of the Law, God asks us to love other people as much as we love ourselves. So the man gave answer to the question that he had asked and Jesus indicated to him that theoretically, if you follow that, you can indeed gain eternal life. You can earn God’s favor and you can be sure that the door of heaven will be open to you once you have to leave this world. *“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live”* (Luke 10:28).

You can see what Jesus was doing. He was saying to this man, “You seem to casually believe that you have done rather well keeping both of those Commandments. You have loved God the way he wants you to. You love other people well enough. But what I am asking you to do now is to be honest with yourself. Look into your heart guided by your conscience and ask yourself the question—have you really loved God with every ounce of strength that is in you? Have you loved him all your life? Have you given him first place in your heart and in your life in every decision you have made, in every action you have taken, in every word that you have spoken? Have you honestly loved other people as much as you love yourself and have you shown this in every way every day of your life?” But the man was afraid to look into his own heart and soul in all honesty. So he now just asked another question to try to deflect what Jesus had said to him. He was like many people only skimming the surface where spiritual things are concerned. He wanted to go on believing he was good enough to earn God’s favor, he was good enough to inherit heaven, but we know Jesus taught his disciples that there is no one good enough to earn God’s favor by nature.

Shortly before this, Jesus had gathered his disciples around him and he had said, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” Jesus was assuring his disciples that they were living in the day of fulfillment. The prophets had pointed ahead to the Messiah, but they never saw him. The prophets revealed the truth of the Messiah, but they never heard the Messiah speak a single word of that truth. But now Jesus had come to fulfill the promise of God, to fulfill the truth concerning the coming Messiah. So what Jesus was teaching his disciples was “there is none of you who is good enough by nature to earn your way into God’s favor and there is surely none of you, not a single one of you who by your own goodness can somehow be sure that you are worthy of inheriting heaven forever.”

When you and I then want to answer that question—are we Good Samaritans?—we do need to answer the question—how can we be good in God’s eyes? We must humbly confess with the apostle Paul, “I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my sinful nature for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” You and I must humbly confess we are lost and condemned sinners by nature and when we look into the mirror of God’s Law, we cannot begin to try to deceive ourselves that we have loved God with heart and soul and mind with every ounce of strength that is in us. We cannot begin to claim that we have put God first every single moment of our lives, and we surely cannot say either that we have loved other people as much as we love ourselves.

So we must humbly confess, “Oh Lord, I am a sinner. I am not good in your eyes by nature.” That is hard to confess. I think every one of us, if somebody were to ask us, “Do you think of yourself as a basically good person?” We would like to be able to answer “yes, I think I am a basically good person,” but that is not true. I am a basically evil person. I am a hopelessly lost sinner by nature and I need to confess that to others. As someone has said, “A church is not a museum for saints. A church is a hospital for sinners.” So we don’t come here because we are so good. Indeed, if we were so good we wouldn’t even need to come here. But we need to come here because we want to come into the presence of a gracious God humbly confessing our sins once again as we do before we go to the Lord’s Supper and cling to him for the mercy and forgiveness we need. We know that it is only by faith in Jesus Christ that God will look upon us as being good. Yes, as long as we trust in Jesus we know that his righteousness is credited to us, and all of our sin and its guilt are washed away. So God not only sees us as good, he sees us as perfect in his sight. He declares us righteous for Jesus’ sake. It is by God’s grace we respond to his goodness in Christ Jesus and then we do good works to the glory of our Lord.

As this man now continued, he asked a question again of Jesus which indicated something concerning the second table of the Law. He was saying to Jesus, “You know, it’s really not that easy to decide just who your neighbor is,” but he, wanting to justify himself, asked Jesus, “*And who is my neighbor?*” (Luke 10:29.) We know that the Lord Jesus then told the Parable of the Good Samaritan to answer that question. So whether the question was asked in a sincere way or not, Jesus gave a sincere answer. He told the Parable of the Good Samaritan to answer that question concerning just who our neighbor is, and we see in the telling of the Parable that Jesus is saying, “The important question is not so much ‘who is a neighbor to me,’ the important question is, ‘who am I being a good neighbor to?’” So he pictured this man in the Parable with a great need. Yes, he pictured a man whose need at the moment was such that he could not possibly help himself. He was at this moment like a little baby—completely dependent on somebody else to help him. Because, Jesus says, “*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead*” (Luke 10:30). So he was unconscious and if he was allowed to remain there, he would undoubtedly die.

Thankfully, this was a busily traveled road, so there were others who came along that way. The first two people who came along were leaders and teachers in the church. These were people who, at least according to their calling, were to have known the love of God. They were people according to their calling who were to teach others to be compassionate and show the love of God to other people. But when a priest came along and he saw the man on the other side of the road, beaten and bloody, not knowing his condition otherwise, he purposely did not get any closer. He passed by on the other side. And the Levite, who wasn’t quite the same kind of teacher in the church but still was somebody who was to serve in the temple and serve as an example of Christian compassion to other people, he too looked at the man, beaten and bloody, lying by the side of the road, and even though he could undoubtedly tell by his clothing that he was a fellow Jew, he purposely did nothing. He too stayed as far away as he

could, passing by on the other side. Now the two men might excuse their failure to do anything by saying, “Those robbers might still be in those hills. They might attack us. We better get by here as quickly as we can and rush on to our destination.” But whatever their excuse was, the bottom line was that they didn’t care enough to help a fellow suffering human being, a fellow Jew at that.

The third man to come along the road was a Samaritan. Now here was one you would not expect to help at all because the Jews hated the Samaritans and wanted to have absolutely nothing to do with them. Very often the Samaritans returned that same kind of feeling and those same kinds of actions, but not this man. This Samaritan, the one you would expect who would not help, was the one who took the time and went and helped this man who was bleeding and dying by the side of the road. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was and when he saw him, he took pity on him. The first thing was that he had a feeling for the man in his own heart. He felt compassion. “What if that was me lying by the side of the road? What would I want someone to do if they came along? Look the other way? Walk away? No, I would be hoping and praying that someone would come and help me.” That is what this man did.

So he is already beginning to give us an answer to the question—who is my neighbor? A neighbor is anyone in need of something I can offer. A neighbor is someone that I can reach out to in some way. And notice that this Samaritan did not limit what he did. He didn’t just do the minimum. *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have’* (Luke 10:34-35). First of all, he did not hesitate to get involved even though he was not a doctor. He gave what help he could. He poured on some wine on the wounds to disinfect them. He poured on some oil to at least begin the healing process to a certain degree. Then he put the man on his own donkey and he walked along while he took the man to the next available inn. And there he personally attended to the man as long as he could. He did not leave until he had to leave on the business he had before him. And before he left, he left money with the keeper of the inn so that the man’s needs would be met after he left and he promised the inn keeper that he would be back the same way when his business was done and if there were any further expenses incurred, he would pay them. So here you can see a man going the extra mile in order to help someone who was hurt.

After telling the Parable, Jesus turned to the man and said, “Who do you think was a neighbor to that man who had fallen among the robbers?” Of course the answer is obvious. The man was perhaps a little bit embarrassed to give the answer and yet, he was willing to do it. He gave the answer, “*The one who had mercy on him*” (Luke 10:37). “Yes” Jesus was saying to him. Those who were of the man’s own country, who surely should have considered this poor hurt person a neighbor, did not do so, but the stranger, the hated person from Samaria, reached out in love and compassion and clearly revealed “my neighbor is someone that I can help. My neighbor is someone that I can reach out to.”

After this response from the man, Jesus said simply, “*Go and do likewise*” (Luke 10:37). And we know that the Lord Jesus is also speaking to us as he speaks in that way. He asks us to go and do likewise. And so it is important for us to ask the question—how do I respond to the needs of others around me? Am I like this man—mainly concerned that others help me when I am in need? Am I mainly concerned that they are friendly to me before I am friendly to them? And am I only going to encourage them if at some time in the past they have encouraged me?

“No” Jesus says. Those are not the questions that you ask. The questions that you ask are—is this a person that I can help in some way? Is there a need here that I can meet? Who of us does not have to confess? Often enough we church people have been guilty of walking by on the other side. We turn the other way not wanting to get involved in any way. Not really wanting to see how great the need is. Not really wanting to see even who it is that is hurting or is hurt or in need of our help. So we have to ask the Lord to forgive us so often for looking the other way. We have to ask the Lord so often to forgive us for not caring even where family members are concerned.

So we pray that God will help us to see that we can be Good Samaritans. We can do good with the strength and motivation that God gives us. He gives us such a motivation in Jesus. He says Christ’s love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died.

What moves me to reach out to others?—because Jesus reached out to me. Jesus was the ultimate Good Samaritan wasn’t he? He saw you and me bleeding and wounded and yes, in danger of dying eternally because we were mortally wounded by our sin and guilt. But he came. He lifted us up. He forgives us daily. He strengthens and renews us.

So now he gives us the opportunity to show our love for him by showing our love for each other. So Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, “*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers*” (Galatians 6:10).

Yes, we reach out first to our immediate family, to our church family, because we know what other Christians are facing in life. We know what temptations they wrestle with every day, but we don’t let it stop there. We reach beyond that to help others. We can’t meet every need fully, but there is often something we can do and we pray that we will do that something in the name of Jesus as an expression of our faith in him and as an expression of our love for him.

Are we Good Samaritans? We pray that in Jesus’ name and to his glory we will seek to do whatever good we can while we can.