

TRINITY 13

September 10 2017

Old Test: II Chronicles 28:8-15

Epistle: Galatians 3:15-22

Gospel: Luke 10:21-37

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The basis for today's sermon is our Gospel lesson just read in your hearing.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord—our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sitting...

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

A religious lawyer,
 one well versed in all that the Old Testament and Jewish tradition
 had to say about the law,
 asks our Lord a question.
 It's a good question—one I wish more people would ask.
 It's, "How do I gain eternal life?"
 Or, "How do I get into heaven?"
 Like I say, it's a good question,
 but it's not sincere.

The lawyer is attempting to trip Jesus up.
 Expose some heterodox view.
 Make Jesus look bad.
 And Jesus knows this.

So in the old rabbinic tradition Jesus turns the question back on the questioner, asking him, "What is written in the law?" Or, "How do you summarize it?" And at the drop of a hat, the lawyer rattles off Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." He says it with such certainty—like he's just come from his confirmation dinner.

He has perfectly defined the law—to which Jesus says,
 "You've got it!" "Do this and you will live."

Do this...
 Do it every moment of everyday,

where your heart is filled to overflowing with love for God
 so much so that when your mind is not forced to think of anything else,
 you naturally and instinctively dwell upon God,
 His promises and His Word.
 This, of course, flows into everything that you say and do.
 Moreover, you don't just like other people, you love them,
 even the one who speaks trash about you behind your back.
 Not only do you love that guy but you move with all of the
 joy, all of the speed, and all of the power to meet everyone's
 needs as much as you meet your own. You love
 everybody—
 that way, even as you love yourself.
 Jesus says to gain eternal life,
 this is what you do.

Does this describe you?
 It better, because according to God, this is what a good person does.
 And to gain heaven,
 you who claim to be a such good person must live up to this perfectly.

To close in prayer right now would leave all of you condemned.
 "Go and do likewise" damns us. It damns us all.
 Why? Because this is an impossible standard of justification,
 of being declared righteous by God.
 If eternal life is gained only by doing this,
 forget it. Let's just eat, drink for tomorrow we die.

The truth is, you're not a good person as God defines good and you—
 all of you, need a Savior.

Or, if you don't want to confess that, you can do what the lawyer did.
 You can start looking for loopholes.
 The text reads, Wanting to justify himself he pushes back asking Jesus,
 "And who is my neighbor?"
 The lawyer thought that if he could just narrow down the people he had to love—
 say to just his mom and his dad—his brother and sister—
 (please not my brother-in-law—please, please not him.)
 He wants to know, what are the minimum standards...
 Give me that, and I might have a better shot at getting into heaven.
 To which Jesus says, "That reminds me of a story."

And listen, the meaning of this story is not what most of you learned in Sunday School.
 This parable is not an exhortation to general human kindness.
 It's not encouragement to lend a helping hand to a stranger once in a while.
 Jesus tells this story to frighten His hearers to death.

Again, the lawyer thinks he can gain heaven by being virtuous.
 Our Lord shows him just how virtuous he has to be.
 And this story—it's like the blade of a dull axe coming down on the neck of
 anyone thinking he or she can simply sashay into heaven based on their own
 doing. For most people live under this delusion—that they can be good enough
 to be accepted into eternal life, but they cannot.

The Samaritan that Jesus speaks of,
 this Samaritan is better than the priest,
 and he's better than the Levite—both of whom were guardians of the law.
 They see their fellow Jew lying in the road—
 and they go out of their way to step to the side and avoid him.

However, on this well-known stretch of road infested by bandits,
 the Samaritan risks his own life to help the beaten man.
 It's as if the man lying there were his brother, his next-door neighbor, his friend.
 Coming around the bend, the Samaritan sees him—
 dismounts and checks for a pulse.
 He finds the source of the bleeding and goes about
 the bloody business of cleansing and mending wounds.

The Samaritan interrupts his own trip—
 Sets aside his own plans and hoists the man upon his own animal.
 The Samaritan brings that man to an Inn and continues to care for him there.
 He tends to him throughout the night and then pays the innkeeper to care for the
 man, promising to cover any other charges the man incurs.
 He does all of this for a complete stranger.
 This, Jesus explains, is what it looks like to love your neighbor as yourself.

Then Jesus asks...
 So, which of these three,
 The Priest,
 The Levite,
 Or the Samaritan
 proved to be the neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?

Isn't it obvious?
 Due to the extreme hatred between Jews and Samaritans,
 the lawyer won't even say, "The Samaritan."
 Rather he says, "The one who showed compassion."

And Jesus tells him—just as He said before...
 "Go and do likewise."
 You go be the Good Samaritan.
 Because this is how good and selfless and loving you must be in order to gain
 heaven. Be the Good Samaritan to all people, all the time.

Do you see the problem? It's the same as before.

No one can ever—even if they live a thousand lifetimes—no one can possibly reach the perfection of love pictured here. Yet, this is what Jesus says to those wishing to justify themselves before God.

You might as well be climbing a rope of sand.

So Pastor...

Is there anyone, any one at all,

who loves the Lord with all His heart, soul, strength and mind?

Is there any man who loves His neighbor as Himself?

In this fallen and sinful world—

is there any man who even remotely acts like the Good Samaritan?

There's One—it's Jesus.

He alone fulfills God's holy law.

He alone loves you, even more than Himself.

He is the Good Samaritan who saw you,

wounded by the devil,

abandoned by the Law,

helpless to save yourself because of your inborn sin.

He saw you, wretched, poor, naked and blind, and took pity.

He had mercy.

He sent His Son into our flesh,

even though we were His enemies by birth.

He became our Neighbor.

He came and helped us,

putting His own life in danger,

even sacrificing His own life on the cross

in order to buy the bandages

and the oil and wine to heal our wounds,

to forgive us our sins.

He sent His Gospel to you in the ministry of the Word,

He sent someone to baptize you,

washing your sins away from God's sight.

He brought you into the inn of His holy Church,

where His ministers look after you

and keep applying the healing salve of Word and Sacrament,

until He returns from His journey to bring you safely home.

So, for anyone here asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life..."

Jesus has done it all for you.

And since you have experienced the love of Christ, the Good Samaritan, firsthand,

it's a fitting thing for the Holy Spirit to call out to you now, "Go and do likewise."

Not in order to inherit or gain eternal life.

But because Christ has inherited eternal life for you
and gives it away for free to all who believe in Him.

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Matins: We continue standing for the Te Deum.

Divine Service: You can be seated. (Hymn #953)