

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

[Jesus said] “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

The temptation is real to avoid those words of Jesus at the end of this parable. Jesus said to the lawyer, “You go and do likewise.” We get a bit uneasy with those words because Jesus is commanding this man to literally, “do” something. Anytime we hear that word, “do” our minds throw up the red flag of “that sounds like works righteousness.” The Gospel doesn’t make any demands of “do” and we’re all about the Gospel so “go and do,” we surmise must be explained away in some fashion, reworked into a more “gospel” way, or just simply ignored. Yet, when reading and interpreting the Bible we need to let the text speak. There is a one intended sense or meaning in a text and any form of interpretation needs to be careful to avoid “reading into” the Bible rather than reading out of it.

We do well to not just dismiss this apprehension outright without wondering why this exists. There’s a reason why we get nervous when we hear the command to do something. God’s word is very clear, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” You heard that a few weeks ago in the service and know this passage well, you are good Lutherans after all. Salvation is solely by God’s grace in Christ alone through faith alone. That is what God clearly says and what we, and the whole church, would sooner give up our lives than to renounce that as the Reformation and Martin Luther rightly restored this proclamation. We give our “amens” rightly and boldly to *sola gratia* and *sola fide*.

So, what is this, then, that Jesus commands the lawyer to go and “do likewise?” Let’s go back to the beginning of the Gospel reading and the initial question and response given by Jesus to this man. “Then turning to the disciples he [Jesus] said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.’ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’ And he answered, ‘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.’ And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’”

There’s something interesting here, did you catch it? Jesus doesn’t respond to the lawyer with “you’ve asked a wrong question” or “O foolish lawyer.” No, Jesus gives answer to his question of the law by affirming that the law is indeed good. Jesus told him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” That’s a rather odd response, isn’t it? What’s the deal? Jesus isn’t wrong in what he says and he’s not lying for Jesus can neither err nor can he lie. Jesus knows that doing the law of God is a good and righteous thing. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus commands us to “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Jesus knows that what God commands is indeed a good thing, and the law is not sin. The law reveals God’s will and is “good and wise” as the hymn aptly states.

This also gets to the purpose for which the Word became flesh. In Galatians 4 it says, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Jesus lived out the law of God perfectly. Not only that but his obedience is our salvation as Romans 5 says, “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” Obeying God’s law is a good, right, and salutary thing. God’s law is not the problem nor is it the enemy. Jesus answered the lawyer’s question and his response correctly, “do this; and you will live.”

So, then, what’s the problem? The law is not the problem. The law is not sin. Sin is the problem; we are the problem. There’s something wrong with this lawyer. He can’t save himself. We can’t save ourselves. This can be seen in the question the lawyer asks next of Jesus, “But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

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Did you catch that? Luke even records for us the condition of this man's heart, he was desiring to justify himself. The lawyer wants to know who his neighbor is so that he can draw a line in the sand, so to speak, and make the law of God more achievable. That's what our old man does when he thinks he can somehow save himself. He thinks he can somehow make the commands of God fit his thinking and life so that he can be good by what he has done or doesn't have to do. This is also the case when we try to rationalize away sin when accused by God, thinking that we are somehow justified in our actions be they as an excuse or to dismiss what God says entirely. To try and justify ourselves we'll put the blame on others, God himself, or God's law. God calls us, however, to confess our sins and not call God a liar.

The parable of the Good Samaritan, then, convicts the lawyer. The shift is made to show him that he can't save himself and needs something or rather someone. It shows him that what God desires is mercy. Love is shown to one's neighbor and one's neighbor extends beyond our own definition of who he may be or want. In Luke 16, the rich man had Lazarus placed at his gate and the rich man showed him no mercy. The convicting part is not fully known how it hits the lawyer but, obviously being a good Jew by his recitation of the law at the beginning of the reading, he would have not considered a Samaritan to be his neighbor. Likewise, as a good Jew, he would have thought he was justified in passing by the injured man as he thought the law would have exempted him from it. For a Samaritan to stop, bend down, and do what is right is mind boggling. Yet, he is the one who serves as an example of what the lawyer is called to do. The lawyer's mouth is stopped, and he is left with no way out other than for that same mercy to be shown to him.

God's mercy, then, is seen in this Parable of the Good Samaritan. This is the chief thing throughout the parable that God shows you and your eyes see, and your ears hear. God has had mercy on you in Christ who lived perfectly in obedience to God's law and is without sin. Jesus did what you can't do. Jesus did go and live the law of God and he lives and by that life you live. That's the Lord's active obedience. And there's great mercy in all of this as your Lord looks on you. It's this same Jesus, your Savior, who has come down to pull you out of the depths and give you in return that perfect righteous obedience he has accomplished and takes on your sin, suffering the wrath of God, which is due your sin, your unrighteousness. He suffered as the perfect sacrifice, this passive obedience, as your substitute who made payment for your sin by shedding his blood and giving up his life as a ransom for you. Now God counts that righteousness of Jesus, his life and death, to you for the sake of Jesus. You have what he has done and it's yours solely out of his grace and mercy to you and it's all received through faith. Your righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus, it's the righteousness of faith received through the word and sacraments.

As the baptized people of God, the mercy God shows to you in Christ is never ending and it overflows in abundance in love toward your neighbor. This is, then, where the command to "you go; and do likewise" doesn't fall on deaf ears when you hear it. You see with opened eyes and hear with ears that have been opened to hear God's word. Now you, as a Christian, go back and hear this parable again and see the example of the Good Samaritan and delight in what it teaches you about your new life in Christ and what your love toward your neighbor is to look like. You desire to show mercy. You delight in what God teaches. 1 John 4 wonderfully and clearly explains this all well as you consider this Parable told by Jesus this morning and who you are now as a baptized child of God who is a new creation with a new heart and spirit: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

So, what does this look like in your life? Well ask yourself that question "who is my neighbor?" Ask that question but do so not to justify yourself but as one who has been shown mercy and desires to show mercy to others. Look at who you are and where God has placed you in this life. Start with your closest neighbor and spiral out from there. Your closest neighbor is your spouse, if you are married, and then your children, if God has granted them to you. Next keep circling out to others in your life. See these people with real faces and who you know in your life. Show them mercy.

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Forgive them when they sin against you. Pray for them. Have compassion on them and care for them. Learn from the Scriptures what this godly love and mercy is to look like as you live in this world. Teach your neighbor. Rebuke in love if necessary for the sake of calling them to repentance. See and know what they need and help them. Above all point them to Jesus who has shown them the same mercy he has shown to you.

Now, it can be easy to overwhelm yourself when a burden that God has not given to you. There will always be times in your life when you have failed to show mercy either by what you have done or failed to do. It's also easy to think you are having to take on the world as neighbor. It is true that these are your neighbors but love, serve, and show mercy where God has placed you. There's also a reason why salvation is not by the law. You can't do it all, Jesus has so always trust in Christ and go running to him for forgiveness. Yet, don't shy away and be afraid to live out your Christian life. Your Lord himself says to you this very day, "You go and do likewise." He says that to you as one whom he knows and has redeemed by his blood.

Dear saints of God, and that's who you are, his saints, God has mercy on you in Christ. His mercies are new every morning and great is his faithfulness. You deserve nothing but death and hell, yet God has redeemed you by his blood. Your sin is forgiven, and you are an heir of eternal life. Your inheritance is that of a son and you are a son indeed called by name in the waters of your baptism. Rejoice this day in what mercy you have been shown. You are redeemed by the blood of Christ. Your wounds have been healed. You've been lifted and taken to the inn. You are fed and nourished at the cost of the Lord, and he promises you he is coming again to take you to be with himself. Have confidence in all this today as a Christian. Know with certainty that you belong to Christ, your sin is forgiven, and you have eternal life.

Rejoice too in showing mercy to your neighbor for Christ has died for him too. Don't be afraid of what Jesus commands but delight in it and live in it as a baptized child of God. "Go and do likewise" knowing who you are in Christ and loving what he has commanded for it all good just as he is good, true, and beautiful. Your Lord and Redeemer is coming again in glory this time to dwell with him not an inn but a new creation beyond compare and will be your dwelling place free of sin, death, and the attacks of the devil. That day will be a glorious day where the journey is over and you will have rest, peace, refreshment, and live forever.

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