

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 14, 2019

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The Compassionate Samaritan

Luke 10:25–37

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

Following the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus said to the lawyer, “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” (vv 36–37).

The Church has been called a hospital for sinners *and* a field hospital after battle. Imagine our world, then, as a major battlefield—Gettysburg, Waterloo, the Somme, Verdun, the beaches of Normandy. The number of casualties is huge, and more wounded are dragged in all the time. Close to the battlefield, right next to the front lines, is the Church. She’s there to serve the injured. Her doors open wide in mercy. The pews are gurneys and hospital beds for the spiritually sick and wounded, for those whom the devil has assaulted and the world has maimed and sin like shrapnel has shredded.

What does it mean? It means that we’re here, or should be here, to receive spiritual care. To have the Great Physician of body and soul do His work on us, care for us who are dead and dying, and restore life. Some of us wear our wounds on the outside. They’re tough to hide, even with bandages. Sin’s limp is noticeable. Other injuries are less obvious but no less deadly. Envy, lust, and deceit can be hidden but are still poison to the soul. Sometimes we may manage the symptoms, but we certainly can’t heal ourselves.

All in all, it’s bloody, not beautiful; it’s gruesome, not glorious. In fact, calling the Church a hospital for sinners might be too tame, because she isn’t in the business of helping sinners get better. She refuses to discharge people with sin, to give them the “all clear” and send them away while still in their sin. Instead, she cares for sinners until they’re buried. So it’s more like extended hospice care for the wounded. The Church is a morgue for the dead. Yet a strange morgue—people arrive dead and dying but in Christ they leave truly alive!

The image of the Church as hospital or field hospital or even morgue seems fitting for the Parable of the Good Samaritan. For A MAN FELL AMONG ROBBERS, WHO STRIPPED HIM AND BEAT HIM AND DEPARTED, LEAVING HIM HALF DEAD (v 30). That man had the living daylight knocked out of him. He was beaten within an inch of his life. He's as good as dead by the time the highway robbers have finished with him, and those who pass by probably think he's already dead.

That a man should be stripped, beaten, and left for dead is no surprise. Such things make the nightly news and the morning headlines. The surprise is that the man who fell among robbers isn't the only one who is half-dead in this parable. NOW BY CHANCE A PRIEST WAS GOING DOWN THAT ROAD, AND WHEN HE SAW the beaten man HE said, "Not *my* neighbor," and PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE. SO LIKEWISE A LEVITE, WHEN HE CAME TO THE PLACE AND SAW HIM, said, "Not *my* neighbor," and PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE (vv 31–32). The priest and the Levite each had a pulse and a heartbeat, but is someone *really* alive who can ignore a neighbor lying half-dead in a ditch? What kind of person avoids the needy like the plague? Is that *love*?

No, of course it isn't. The priest and the Levite act according to the Law, but they violate the law of love. They've nailed the letter of the Law to a "t" but destroyed its deeper meaning and intention. Instead of allowing the Law to guide their love, they use the law to avoid love. Wanting to keep their hands clean, to remain pure and undefiled by that half-dead man, they pass by on the other side. It's true that they didn't hurt or harm their neighbor in his body. That's what the robbers did. But they failed to help and support him in every physical need. Living bodies but dead souls—that's the priest and the Levite. Their souls are dead to mercy and compassion. So whenever you see a person in need and say, "Not *my* neighbor," avoiding him and passing by on the other side, you're already way more than half dead yourself.

That's the state of the lawyer who STOOD UP TO PUT Jesus TO THE TEST, SAYING, "TEACHER, WHAT SHALL I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE." He knows what's written in the law: "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" (vv 25, 27). "That's right," Jesus says. "You've got it. DO THIS, AND YOU'LL LIVE" (v 28). And just to make sure—because he's bound and determined to live by the Law or die trying—the lawyer asks one more question: "AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?" (v 29). That's dotting his i's and crossing his t's.

He thinks the Law will justify him. When he looks at the Law, he's only looking at himself. He thinks that it shows how clean and pure and healthy he is. But he's got no idea how lost he is—that it's his heart lying in the ditch, beat up and barely functioning, living on borrowed time, having no mercy or compassion. He doesn't really love God *or* his neighbor. The Law *can* diagnose our sicknesses and identify our wounds. But it *can't* heal or give life to the dead, and we all know what the dead inherit: *nothing*. It's not his knowledge of the law that's missing but compassion. The Law, used properly, is a window through which we see and serve the neighbor.

In contrast to the lawyer, the Good Samaritan is the only one who is really, truly alive. This SAMARITAN, AS HE JOURNEYED, CAME TO WHERE the half-dead man WAS, AND WHEN HE SAW HIM, HE HAD COMPASSION. Literally, his insides were twisted in knots. That wasn't the Law at work in him but love at work. So HE WENT TO HIM AND BOUND UP HIS WOUNDS, POURING ON OIL AND WINE. THEN HE SET HIM ON HIS OWN ANIMAL AND BROUGHT HIM TO AN INN, to a field hospital, AND TOOK CARE OF HIM (vv 33–34).

Who is this, except our Lord Jesus Christ? In the Gospels, God alone shows the type of compassion that we see in the Good Samaritan. *His* heart goes out to those who are wounded, to the half-dead, to those lacking compassion and mercy. And so He came to earth but didn't pass by on the other side of the road. He climbs down into the ditch, takes the wounded and dead on His own shoulders, loads them on the donkey, and brings them to the inn, to the field hospital. To His Church. And here we are cared for in His name. The credit in His account is used on us. Everything He gained by going down into the ditch, by suffering, dying, and being crucified. He treats us with His gifts, with oil and wine, baptism, absolution, and Holy Communion. And He puts us in the care of the Church and her members. His love goes *way* beyond what the Law commands!

*JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD, SHOWS THE COMPASSION AND MERCY
THAT WE NEED TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord both cares for us in the Church and calls us to care for others. The parable says THE NEXT DAY HE TOOK OUT TWO DENARII AND GAVE THEM TO THE INNKEEPER, SAYING, "TAKE CARE OF HIM, AND WHATEVER MORE YOU SPEND, I WILL REPAY YOU WHEN I COME BACK" (v 35). And He will come back, on the clouds in glory with His angel hosts. And we have His promise, as we do the work of our Samaritan: "TAKE CARE, AND

I WILL REPAY.” Here we receive care, and we reach out with care to others, those lying in the ditches and the others who are here with us at the inn.

So, whether hospital or field hospital or morgue, as the Church let’s make use of what the Lord has given us and treat with compassion and mercy every neighbor we meet, praying that through us they would come to know the Good Samaritan who has cared for us and who cares for us still. For by His compassion, we have received grace and mercy to help in every time of need and we have begun to love, even as He has loved us.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
