

**Luke 10:25-37**  
**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (C)**  
**11 July 2010**

***“What’s Mine . . .”***

I. The Good Samaritan. It’s a familiar story. Perhaps so familiar that we listen to it without considering the context. We know it so well that we might overlook the dynamic of what’s happening between our Lord and the expert of the law, whose questions prompt the story.

St. Luke tells us that the man comes to “test” Jesus, to see whether Jesus’ theology would hold water—“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” he asks him. But Jesus turns the tables and puts a question to him: “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” Expert that he is, the man answers with the Scriptural truth, quoting from Deuteronomy and Leviticus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength; and love your neighbour as yourself” (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:34).

But, in answering, the expert realizes that the truth has found *him* out. Instead of putting Jesus to the test, he has put the test to himself; and in the process he discovers his own theology is full of holes and leaking badly. And so he tries to short-circuit God’s demands on his life by going another verbal round with Jesus, questioning who (if anyone) this “neighbour” possibly might be. As Luke notes, he tries “*to justify himself*”; he tries to make himself look O.K.; tries to eject himself out of the cockpit before his plane crashes and burns on the granite face of the unbending demands of the God’s Law. And so, he asks: “Who is my neighbour?”

Do you ever find yourself asking the same kind of question? Do you ever find yourself in the expert’s shoes, trying to justify your relationship with those around you? Especially those who may not be very appealing or very lovable, or those who demand a lot of your time or attention? Do you find yourself back-peddling, trying to sidestep the demands of God’s Law, trying to prove that there are some people and some situations where He couldn’t possibly expect you to love them, at least not with all your heart and soul and strength? And so Jesus tells the story to test our attitudes and to show us how the love and mercy of God in Christ truly work.

II. The story divides nicely into three main characters, who relate differently to the suffering of the neighbour on the side of the road. The first is the thieves. They see the person traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, but don't really see him as a person. They only see his money, clothes, and donkey. Perhaps they see him as someone upon whom they can take out their frustrations. But, with no concern for him or his life or his health or his family, they rob him, beat him, take everything he has, and leave him on the road to die.

Their outlook on life can be characterized as *"What's yours in mine, and I'll take it."* You can see the same attitude operating today: from aggressive driving on the 401, to lifting supplies at work, to using people for sexual gratification, to stepping on others for professional advancement, to nations at war for oil or land. This is what makes the home security and insurance and psychotherapy businesses as fast-growing as they are. It's what makes our world such a precarious place to live, with people so fearful, defensive and over-protective. *What's yours in mine, and I'll take it*—as common an attitude as it is, we know it's not what the Lord wants, it's not the Christian way.

Neither is the attitude shown by the next ones down the road: the priest and the Levite. If the view of the thieves is: *"What's yours is mine, and I'll take it,"* the way the priest and Levite think is: *"What's yours is yours, what's mine is mine, and let's just leave it like that."* When they saw the bloody mess on the side of the road, they were very well worried that the same thing might happen to them. Besides, they were late for a meeting at church. What would they do, what would people say, if they got blood and dirt all over their nice clean clerical clothes? And, if by chance, the man was already dead, they'd be ceremonially unclean and unable to take part in the religious activities in the Temple. And so they hurried on their way, just as we do sometimes today.

A seminary professor once described for his class someone he knew who didn't smoke or drink or gamble or sprinkle his conversation with obscenities, and asked if that person were Christian. "Not only is he a Christian," one student replied, "But I hope I have a church full of them when I get out into the ministry." "Strange," the professor said, "I wasn't talking about a parishioner, I was describing my dog."

It's a silly story, but it has a point, doesn't it? Being a Christian isn't so much in what we don't do; it's more in what we do do. True, the priest and the Levite didn't beat the man or take his money or clothes. But the

man certainly wasn't any better off after they had come than he was before. In fact, from the Lord's perspective, as pious as they might be, the priest and Levite weren't much different from the thieves. "*What's yours is mine, and I'll take it*" and "*What's yours is yours, what's mine is mine, and let's just leave it like that*" are really two sides of the same coin. They both put the emphasis on *what's mine* to the exclusion of *what's yours*. "Mine" and "Me" figure so large that there's little or no room for "you," and, therefore, no understanding of what it means to be a "neighbour."

It's in the third character, the Samaritan, that we meet something qualitatively different. Instead of "*What's yours is mine, and I'll take it*" and "*What's yours in yours, what's mine is mine, and let's just leave it like that,*" here is one who says: "*What's mine is yours, let's share it.*" The same potential danger was there, the same bloody, messy body, the same intrusion on time and money—but the Samaritan becomes involved, reaches out to touch and to heal. He "*had compassion*". "Compassion" means to share passion, to take part in suffering.

Given the "*What's yours is yours*" mentality of this world, I suppose it's not surprising that so many people are left lying on the side of the road of life, battered and hurting, hurting so long and deeply that they have little hope of healing left. Perhaps because of our own hurts, perhaps because of the times we ourselves have been left to bleed untended and ignored, it seems easier to try to insulate ourselves from the moans and groans we hear around us. Even if we don't stoop so low as to enrich our life directly at the expense of someone else, it's easy to become callous to the pain we see, to walk by on the other side of the road rather than becoming involved. It's so much easier to try to get through life uninterrupted and unburdened, and, then, like the lawyer, to justify ourselves, to attempt to convince ourselves that it's O.K. to be like that.

And that's why our Lord knows that we need to hear this story over and over again today. We need to know that the attitude of the priest and Levite—just as much as the attitude of the thieves—is not right, is not Christian, is not the way our Lord wills us to be. When put to the test these attitudes need to be found leaking and full of holes, to be known for what they are: shallow and selfish, even damnable.

But that's also why our Lord knows we need to hear about the Good

Samaritan, too. We need to know that the Good Samaritan is not only a character in a story, but the kind of being the Son of God is, who has come into our flesh. Our Lord Jesus came into the world not as a passerby, a tourist, a royal dignitary, or a holier-than-thou high priest. He has come as one full of compassion, as the one who gives His life and His all for a whole world of people suffering on the side of the road of life, including us; those suffering not only at the hands of others, but suffering from what we do to ourselves and others because of our sinful, self-centered flesh.

He comes not only to suffer with us, but to suffer for us. Instead of saying: “*What’s yours is yours, what’s mine is mine, and let’s just leave it at that,*” he says “*What’s Mine is yours. Let Me share it.*” He washes us with Water and the Spirit, bandages our wounds with the balm of His cross-won forgiveness, puts on us His righteous garments, and makes us whole. He feeds us with His own bloodied but now risen body and pours out His lifeblood in, with and under the wine. He gives us His life and seats us with Him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:4-6). And He pays the whole bill, “not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death” (*Small Catechism*, Apostles’ Creed, Second Article). He shares everything with us. Not to get anything out of us. But purely out of love, purely as an act of mercy.

And then He says, “Go and do likewise.” Freely given, we can now freely give. This is the Christian life, because it flows from the life given us in Christ. Not that it is easy or that everyone will be impressed with what we’re doing—not even the Samaritan was thanked as far as we know. The Lord didn’t give up His life to impress the crowds, either. He did it because that *is* His life, that is His *raison d’être*, His reason for being. And we do it because this is life for us, the life of those who have been “justified” in Christ, those who have been reconciled and made right with God the Father through Him.

That’s what our Lord hoped the lawyer would figure out. There is no need for us to justify ourselves. That’s impossible. Rather, He has come to justify us, to reconcile us with the Father and one another, to bring us peace and healing. And justified through the faith given us in Holy Baptism and nurtured by His Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit can continue to shape us in the mold of Good Samaritan and teach us to say to those around us: “*What’s mine is yours, let me share it with you.*”

*Preached at Historic St. Paul’s Lutheran Church-Kitchener, ON  
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