

TRINITY XIII – AUGUST 29, 2021 – LUKE 10:23-37

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

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

Amen.

“But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ In reply Jesus said, ‘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...But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came to where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 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.’” Thus far our text

“Won’t you be my neighbor?” This familiar catchphrase from *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* reminds us of how much we appreciate the times that friends have helped us out in our daily life struggles. The concept that life is “nasty, brutish and short”, to summarize Hobbes, without companionship is very true. We all yearn for a next-door neighbor like Wilson on *Home Improvement* that is always available to listen to our problems, and give sage advice for our day-to-day issues. A good friend is more precious in our lives than gold, and we can certainly identify with a good “neighborly” relationship. However, our text from Luke’s Gospel tells us that Jesus would have us consider more than just our friends and those with whom we get along with as our neighbors. Rather, He generalizes the subject even more to tell us that God’s will is that

we would be kind to all men, showing love to everyone in our lives, whether or not they would do the same toward us. More than just a restatement of the “Golden Rule”, however, this passage points out to us that even the “good people” of the time, when faced with a situation of unrequited love, would prefer to pass by on the other side of the road. Such is the sinful nature that clings to us like glue.

The Good Samaritan in our text IS the good neighbor that Jesus speaks of. He personifies all of the qualities that we think of in a good neighbor, and even more. He bandaged the man’s wounds, he healed the man’s problems, and even ensured that his needs would continue to be met after he had continued along his way. In short, the Samaritan was loving and kind toward the man who was wounded, even though the Samaritan knew he would receive nothing tangible for the kindness. The amazing fact in this story is that the man who did all of these wonderful things was a Samaritan, an outcast in Jewish society. After all, the Samaritans reminded the Jews of the Canaanites, since they were Canaanite descendants. The Samaritans were the lowest of the low among the people of Jesus’ day. Those who were in higher strata, the priest and the Levite, did not do what was right in this situation. Those who were the keepers of the law were not deemed to be good neighbors, according to this story. It would be similar in our time today to have a homeless man on the street be the one to help out someone in trouble, and have a police officer and a social worker walk right on by the situation. It didn’t follow with the preconceived notions of the hearers that the events happened as they did, which followed exactly with Jesus’ purpose in telling the story. The point of the story is that love is the motivating factor in the approval of Jesus, not adherence to the

law or anything else. The love that was shown by the Samaritan was that reflected from the love Jesus showed him, and not anything else!

In addition, Jesus uses this parable to illustrate to the listeners, and to us, that no man would be this loving toward someone that could not pay him back for his kindness. If the Levites and the priests, who were holy, wouldn't do this, then we certainly wouldn't! We are just like the priest and the Levite, and care more about ourselves than we do about others. How many of us have friends that are truly unable to respond to our kindness and love? Most of us have friends of similar social or economic status. After all, our society states and believes that "It's not what you know, it's who you know." We value having friends that have high social stature, and are often not above using others' positions to help our own. Conversely, how many times have "friends" deserted us when times were tough? How many of us can relate to Job? When he was being tempted by the devil, and had all of his material wealth and all of his family taken from him, even his wife urged him to "curse God and die." His "friends" did the same thing. With friends like those, who needs enemies?! Because of the fickleness of our world, many are driven to "look out for number one", because no one else will. We have become a very self-centered society, in which we are not good neighbors to each other. We easily fall into the bitterness and pain of the world around us. We don't listen to the truth that if we don't allow anyone to love us, we aren't loved, either. We don't get hurt as much, but we also don't get loved, either. We are concerned about the social stigma of being the one to help the one in need, or concerned about not having enough to help ourselves out of trouble in the future, or whatever! No matter what the excuse that we give is, our nature

would have us walk on the other side of the road, and not be like the Good Samaritan and help the brother in need.

However, there is also a great deal of hope and joy in this story. Jesus was a neighbor to us – He is the Good Samaritan. He helped us out of a huge problem – sin. Just as the Samaritan healed the wounds of the injured man, so Christ heals us of the guilt of our sin. He took away our sins by paying the price for them Himself. He restored us to the plan that God had for us, which is eternal life. When no one else on earth cares about us, or gives a care about what happens to us, we can remember and draw strength from the fact that even if each of us were the only one that Christ would have saved from eternal death by dying and rising again, He would have done it for just us! Only He could do this, and only His love was strong enough to endure all that He did. He was the only man who was without sin, and therefore had the power to make the remission of sins apply to all sinful men by His one death and resurrection. This is the good news, that we have a Good Samaritan, a Savior, who has come to heal us.

In addition, He provides for our needs even today. He gives us the privilege of praying to the Father in His Name, and promises that whatever we pray according to His will is done for us by His love. He gives us strength for every day, and the hope of heaven. This heals our wounds of sadness and hopelessness in a world that is full of both. He is our companion, even when our “friends” have deserted us. Even when there aren’t any good neighbors around, He is our all-sufficient hope. Thanks be to God for His love to provide such a wonderful gift to us every day of our lives. He continues to bind up our wounds when we confess our sins, by absolving them and removing them

from us as far as the east is from the west. We can be confident of this because of His promise that He will do so. His Word is good, and cannot be broken!

Because Christ was a neighbor to us, and showed love toward us, we in turn are empowered to be neighbors to others. The “cycle of love”, as it is called, started by Jesus, continues throughout the world. Because our wounds are healed, and His love is at work in our hearts, the works of the Holy Spirit are evidenced in our lives. We are given the impetus and the urging by the Holy Spirit to be Good Samaritans to others in this world, showing Christian love to them, and not expecting anything in return. These works have nothing to do with us, but everything to do with God. He causes them to happen, and we are mere instruments of His plan here on earth. The only source of anything good in this world is the Holy Spirit, and all that we can do is thank Him for overcoming our resistance to Him. This is just another wonderful aspect of the love of Christ – He didn’t give up on this world, and wants to bring all men to Himself in heaven. He wants to bind up the wounds of this world, and take all of us rebellious people in His loving arms.

Unlike one set of neighbors that I heard about once that were at each others’ throats to the point of one purchasing roosters to annoy the other in the morning, the story of the Good Samaritan points us to the example Christ would give us of who a good neighbor really is – Himself. The one who showed compassion on the man, the one who loved him and cared for him, is the neighbor to the man. Therefore, to keep the second of the greatest commandments, the second table of the Law, perfectly is to show this unselfish, giving love to the neighbor every day. Because we are not capable of this, due to our complete sinfulness and selfishness, Christ was that neighbor to us. He answered

the question, “Won’t you be my neighbor?” in the affirmative when He died and rose again on Calvary. God indeed was our Immanuel, or God With Us, that day. He healed our wounds of sin and death, and bandaged us with His blood. He paid for our eternal care by guaranteeing us a place in the inn of heaven with Him in Holy Baptism. He continually nourishes us with His Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, to remit our sins and strengthen our faith in Him. In short, He has done it all for our salvation. Even better than having Wilson next door to give sage advice, we have a Savior who loves us so much that He was not willing for us to perish, but made eternal life HAPPEN! Thanks be to God that He is our good neighbor. Amen.

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

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.