

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the twenty-fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.⁴

“When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee. And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God.

“Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee. The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

“Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow’s raiment to pledge: But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

“When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Verse of the tenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁵

“And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed [SHOWD] mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The parable we heard in today's Second Lesson is called the Parable of the Good Samaritan. However, the Lord Jesus simply called the protagonist "a certain Samaritan." The Samaritan is not held up as an *extraordinary* example, but merely as a *proper* example. If there is anything praiseworthy about the Samaritan, it is his mercy and humility. For, the Samaritan was chosen to be an exemplary character in the story, quite deliberately, to make a simple point: You must love your neighbor without regard for how he has treated you, or how you expect him to treat you later.

The Samaritans were despised by the Jews, and they returned the resentment with no love lost. Jesus, however, reached out to the Samaritans. On one occasion the Samaritans of one village refused to receive him⁶ but earlier another Samaritan village did receive him (John 4:1-42). Even there, however, the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well reminded him, "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."

It is highly significant, therefore, that the principal character in the story is a Samaritan. Of all the men who came by, and saw the wounded Jewish victim of a criminal attack lying on the side of the road, the Samaritan was the least likely to want to help him. Why should he help a man who, no doubt, was entirely prejudiced against him? Perhaps, if the victim were awake and alert in his helpless condition, he would fear the Samaritan's approach. Perhaps, despite his need for help from somebody—anybody—he might nonetheless say something like, "Don't touch me with your Samaritan hands!"

But the Samaritan had one purpose, and that was to love his neighbor as himself, and therefore to respond to that neighbor's need. He may never win a friend for his efforts, maybe not the man himself, and maybe no one back home who might disapprove of helping a Jew. He may have been afraid to tell the folks back home. But, at that moment he was "*moved with compassion*," and he obeyed the Law of God; he acted out of charity, love for his neighbor—even *this* neighbor.

The lawyer, in this case the student of the Torah, who asked Jesus about the commandments, no doubt had heard the Lord teach before. He

already knew what were, in the teaching of Jesus, the two greatest commandments of the Law, and was able to answer accordingly: “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.*” And [Jesus] said unto him, *Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*”

Of course, Jesus did not only teach these things. He demonstrated them as well. The book of Isaiah foretold the day when God would, as St. Paul later put it, “*Commend His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”⁷ See the famous *Suffering Servant* passage. The prophet foresaw the day when the crowds would be turned against Jesus, rewarding the Man “*Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil*”⁸ with hatred and rejection for all the good He had done. So wrote the prophet, roughly 700 years ahead of that day, “*He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*”⁹ The Lord was treated worse than a Samaritan by his Jewish brethren, and worse still by the Romans who perpetrated the violence and cruelty that he endured. At the Cross He acted with love, according to the needs of each and every one of us.

*“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:
yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities:
the chastisement of our peace was upon him;
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*¹⁰

He had said, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”¹¹ On the Cross He proved that a friend may or may not be one who loves you but he is someone you love as your neighbor. Jesus called even Judas “friend” as he betrayed the Lord:

“And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come?”¹² From His perspective, as He was hanging on the Cross and pouring out His soul unto death for you, and for me, Jesus Christ did not have an enemy in the world. Yes, He saw that they poured forth their hatred against Him:

“Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.

They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.

They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”¹³

Yes, they saw *Him* as an enemy, and treated him as a conquered enemy, exhibiting glee from the spectacle of his torments, triumphing with cruel merriment. But, from his Divine and human perspective, He was laying down His life for them, and *that* made them His friends, as it makes you His friend.

“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.”¹⁴

So, Jesus not only *taught* us to treat everyone as friends (even those who hate us); He *did so* Himself:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be

the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."¹⁵

This is not to be treated lightly. As God on his throne in heaven, equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Son could not be harmed by man's malice. But as a man, with flesh and blood like you and me, we see Jesus demonstrating the love of God through His human nature, actually *suffering* injustice, cruelty and pain; and He responded by forgiving and praying for His persecutors. This was *Divine* forgiveness from the *Man* Christ Jesus.¹⁶

Getting back to the parable, look at the men who "passed by on the other side". They saw their brother, a man of the same people and the same faith, stripped of his raiment, wounded and half-dead. The first man who saw him was a priest of the Temple. No doubt, he had his religious duties to attend to. Perhaps, from all he could tell, the man was dead, and therefore the priest did not want to be made ritually unclean. So, too, the Levite. He also served in the Temple, and if this man was dead, he, like the priest, did not want the inconvenience of being made ceremonially unclean. Their religious duties, awaiting them in Jerusalem, must have seemed too important to be interrupted by the need, even the desperate need, of this their neighbor.

I would think in the parable the Lord was using irony. Here are two men who know the Law, who belong to the Temple, who do sacred work, passing by the man, passing by on the far side of the road. But a Samaritan, despised and rejected wherever his business took him in Israel, is the one man who obeys the Law. Yes, I *would* think the Lord was using irony, if not for my many years of seeing some religious people, the kind who are very correct about every little detail all the time, who know the rubrics better than God does.

All too often I have seen scrupulously religious people behave the same way that the priest and the Levite do in this parable. On the Last day you will not answer to God for how well you knew all the rubrics. You *will* answer for how well you loved your neighbor. Someone who serves in the Temple might pass by on the other side. However, one who serves God would not, even if he is *only* a Samaritan.

The Samaritan in the story did not do a great thing, but merely did his duty. The priest and the Levite did a great thing, for they committed a very grave sin. When news came to Tobit that a man of Israel had died, he rose from his dinner and buried him, even though the king had ordered that the corpses of Jews were to be left to rot, so that the crowds could belittle and insult them even in death.

“And in the time of Enemessar I gave many alms to my brethren, and gave my bread to the hungry, and my clothes to the naked: and if I saw any of my nation dead, or cast about the walls of Nineve, I buried him. And if the king Sennacherib had slain any, when he was come, and fled from Judea, I buried them privily; for in his wrath he killed many.”¹⁷

Acts of charity are always in accord with the Law of God. If the rare occasion arises wherein charity appears to conflict with a religious duty, God has commanded us to place charity as the higher priority. The Priest and Levite should have risked ceremonial uncleanness, a mere concern of the cultic “Kosher Laws,” to obey the moral law to love their neighbor in his time of need. Someone else could serve in the temple during the time in which they might have become *lo tahor*, or ritually “unclean”. It would not have been the end of the world. If ever your sensitivities, and not merely but *especially* your religious sensitivities, incline you to place ceremony or rubrics ahead of charity, be certain that God will regard your prayers as an abomination, adding sin to sin. *“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.”¹⁸*

And, concerning that Law, the second great commandment is this: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Jesus has taught us the way,

and in showing us the way has, on His Cross, redeemed us from sin and death.

“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He that shewed [SHOWD] mercy on him.’ Then said Jesus unto him, ‘Go, and do thou likewise.’”



The Rev’d Robert Hart¹⁹
September 2, 2012

¹ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Deuteronomy 24:10-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 10:23-37 (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 9:52.

⁷ Romans 5:8.

⁸ Acts 10:38.

⁹ Isaiah 53:3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vv. 4-6.

¹¹ St. John 15:13.

¹² St. Matthew 26:50.

¹³ Psalm 22:12-18.

¹⁴ St. Luke 23:33-34.

¹⁵ St. Matthew 5:43-48.

¹⁶ I Timothy 25.

¹⁷ *Tobit* 1:16-18; *see also Tobit* 2:3-8.

¹⁸ Proverbs 28:9.

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