

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity²

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

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

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for 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).

But Jesus does not leave you on your own. He comes to you. He uses His own resources to provide for your healing. He asks nothing of you but to accept His generosity and His personal sacrifice.

The Samaritan in the parable offered his personal wealth to save the man's life. Jesus offered His own life to save the life of everyman.

People sometimes talk about bringing others to church so they can be saved. The fact is that it is Jesus who brings people to church, and they have already been saved when He brings them. They were saved on Good Friday. Our job is help them to realize that, to shelter them and nurture them and help them to grow in the faith that we ourselves have found in the Church.

It is a good thing to do kindnesses for strangers, but that does not make us good Samaritans. There is only one good Samaritan, and that is Jesus—the one who had compassion on us all.

Jesus is the perfect image of the Father. He wants us to reflect and imitate Him. In another place, Jesus says, "Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful." Here, the good Samaritan, who Himself has set the example, says, "Go and do thou likewise.

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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).

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:

It is sometimes hard to say something new about passages that I have preached on before, so this morning I am going to say something old about the parable of the good Samaritan.

The Fathers of the Church understood that the story Jesus tells has symbolic significance. Let's look at it as they looked at it.

The man who is mugged by the bandits is everyman. He is all of us, beaten by sin, robbed of our dignity, and left to die with no way to help ourselves. That is the spiritual status of us all.

The representatives of institutional Judaism are unable to help the man. To come in contact with a dead man, and the injured man appeared to be dead, would make a priest or a Levite ceremonially unclean and unable to perform their liturgical functions without going through a long period of ritual cleansing. As they went on their way, giving the man a wide berth, they probably mumbled something like, "I would like to help you but...."

In the book of Hosea, God says, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." But to these men their ceremonial duties were more important than compassion. But those duties would not have helped anyway. As the author of Hebrews says, "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."

The religious leaders of the day ironically called Jesus a Samaritan. It is the Samaritan in the story, unhindered by man-made rules, who does what needs to be done. The good Samaritan is Jesus Himself. He comes to the man and ministers to him. He administers oil, a coagulant, and wine, which has anti-septic qualities, and then delivers him to a place of refuge. The Fathers understood that place to be the Church.

Jesus charges the innkeeper to take care of the man and then goes on His way, promising to return. He makes a down payment, as it were, and promises that when He comes again, He will repay the innkeeper for any of his own resources he may have spent to help the man become whole.

That is what Jesus expects of us. He expects us to take in those whom He brings to us, broken and needy as they may be, and to use for their healing the resources He has given us.

But it is not just the ceremonial law that is powerless to rescue the victim of sin. Jesus told this story in response to a question by an expert in civil and moral law. That question was, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Well, Jesus, like Socrates and other great teachers, had the annoying habit of answering questions by asking questions of His own. So He asked the lawyer what it says in the Jewish law. The lawyer replied with the same summary that Jesus Himself had used: "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 Jesus replied, "That's right. That's what you have to do."

Growing up in Protestant churches as I did, I found it hard to understand why Jesus would allow a man to think that he could attain eternal life by living a good life. But that's not really what He said. Jesus simply agreed that if a man was to be justified by his works, he would have to be perfect.

St. James says, "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." That's good Jewish theology, and the man who asked the question knew it. He also knew that he had not been perfect and he may have realized in his heart what St. Paul later wrote in Romans: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it."

The obvious thing to do at that point was to repent and seek forgiveness. That is what Jesus wanted everybody to do. He still does. But this proud man was determined to "justify himself", as the passage says. So he tried to limit the scope of his obligations and at the same time to embarrass Jesus.

The Jewish elite in Jerusalem were a cliquish bunch. They treated each other well but looked down on the lower classes and they especially despised Samaritans. If Jesus agreed that the duty of loving one's neighbor extended only as far as the limits of one's social circle, the man could claim that did in fact love his neighbor as himself.

On the other hand if Jesus said that what is called "the law of love" extends beyond one's own immediate circle of friends, He would evoke smirks and disdain from the elite. Well, Jesus doesn't say that, but He tells the story and then makes the questioner say it when He asks the legal expert who he thinks was neighbor to the man who was mugged.

The lawyer cannot quite bring himself to name the Samaritan as the hero so he simply says, "He that showed mercy." And there you have it.

Jesus is the One who shows mercy. There is no mercy in the law, there is only condemnation. The law makes plain what is required of you and then, like the priest and the Levite, does nothing to help you.