

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY¹**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the twenty-fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“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.⁴

“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,

A great Anglican priest named John Wesley used to say to the drunkards and the prostitutes and the petty thieves and the exploited workers among whom he labored: “Come with us and we will do thee good.” If we cannot say that to the victims that Christ brings to us, we have no right to call ourselves a Church, much less a Church in the Anglican tradition.

Jesus told this story in response to one man’s attempt to build a fence around his obligations. He wanted to limit his love others to as small a circle as possible. But Jesus would have none of it. He Himself did not limit His love to those who were deserving of it. He loved the unlovable. He loved the outcasts of society. He loved those who did not love Him. He loved the rich, and He loved the poor. He loved the sinners who repented, and He cried over those who did not repent. He expects no less of us.

His word to the lawyer is His word to us: “Go, and do thou likewise.”

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St. David’s Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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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).

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Deuteronomy 24:10-end (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 10:23-37 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 10:37 (KJV).

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.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

The parable of the Good Samaritan has suffered from over-familiarity. Even the term “good Samaritan” has been taken over by the secular world to apply to anyone who helps a stranger in trouble. The characters in the story have become so stylized that we react to them the way audiences used to react in the old melodramas with their stylized villains and their predictable heroes. We boo the priest, hiss at the Levite, and cheer the Samaritan.

Today, I would like to try to freshen up the story by giving you some background and possibly by casting the characters in a different light. Let’s begin with the Samaritan.

After the death of Solomon, there was a civil war, and the kingdom divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south., The Jews in the northern kingdom built themselves a temple on Mt. Gerazim [GARE-ih-zimm] in Samaria, while the Jews in the southern kingdom continued to worship in Solomon’s temple on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem.

The two kingdoms were conquered at various times by various foreign invaders until in the days of Jesus the Romans ruled and occupied both. The Romans divided the country into provinces of which Samaria was one and Judea was another.

The Jews in Judea considered the Samaritans to be foreigners because they had freely intermarried with their pagan conquerors. They considered them traitors because of their rebellion against the house of David. They considered them heretics because of their corrupt worship practices. But in the days of Jesus a group of Samaritans had made matters worse by sneaking into the temple in Jerusalem one night during the Passover season and defiling it by scattering dead men's bones about. That was more than mere vandalism. That was sacrilege, and it could never be forgiven.

Now let's put that aside for now and look at some of the characters in the story. The priest and the Levite [**LEE-vight**] are understandable. They are not just callous. They have important duties to perform and according to Jewish law they would have become ritually unclean and unable to perform those duties if they came in contact with a dead man. The man by the roadside appeared to be dead, so the priest and the Levite [**LEE-vight**] both passed by on the other side of the road, giving the body as wide a berth as possible.

There is another person I can understand. He does not appear in the story itself, but he asked the question that prompted the story in the first place. He is a lawyer. He had just heard Jesus say that the law required him to love his neighbor as himself. Now lawyers, you know, are always looking for ways to limit their liabilities. So when he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?", that's just what he was trying to do. How far do my obligations extend? Do I have to love everybody in the world, or are there some people I can ignore or even be hostile to? Just who is my neighbor? If you would like to put limits on your religious obligations, you can certainly understand this man and his question. I certainly can.

The man who was beaten and robbed is also understandable. Spiritually, he is everyman. We all travel through life on roads that are dangerous to the soul, especially when we travel alone. We are constantly exposed to Satanic forces that seek to

strip us of our dignity, rob us of our heritage as children of God, and leave us for dead. I can understand this victim.

The one person in this passage that I cannot understand is the Samaritan. What was he doing on that road in the first place? Was he going to the temple that his fellow Samaritans had defiled? Had he already been there and maybe gotten thrown out? Why did he stop to help a man who probably hated him? How did he know this wasn't an ambush, with robbers waiting to pounce on any who stopped to help the man? Why did the Samaritan expose himself to such a risk in an alien country? Why did he spend his own money for the man's care and promise to come back with more if necessary? If I understood all of that I would understand the mystery of grace — but I don't.

The Samaritan, you see, is a Christ figure. The Jewish religious leaders even called Him that one time. Christ entered a hostile world where He was despised and rejected. He put His own life at risk for people who neither knew Him nor respected Him. He paid the ultimate price to save such people from ultimate death. I cannot understand why He did that, except that He loved us.

The law cannot love us like that. The law is impersonal. People in positions of honor in this world cannot love us like that. They have too much to lose and too much to defend. No institution, not even a religious institution, can do what Jesus did. Institutions are designed to perpetuate themselves, not to sacrifice themselves. Only God Himself, who can draw on an infinite reservoir of love, is able to take the risk and make the sacrifice required to do what Christ did. He is the Good Samaritan.

Now I'm going to conclude this sermon with a word to the Church, because we are in this story too. We are the innkeepers. We are the people to whom Christ has entrusted the care of the victims He rescues until He comes again. We are ourselves may have been brought to the Church as victims, but now we are charged with the care of other victims. And when Christ comes again, He will repay us for the care we have given.