

Trinity 13, 2013

Luke 10:23-37<sup>i</sup>

### Part I

Many of you may have written a will. You write in it what of your estate you wish to go to whom at your decease. It may go to your children; to a charity; or some other place you specify. When you write a will, you typically put *no* conditions on it. You merely *promise* to bequeath your estate to those named. It is a gift freely given.

In some cases the writers of wills can and do include conditions. I came across an example of a benefactor who did just that. He stipulated the kinds of spouses for his children to have. *If* his children didn't marry those he thought worthy, they would forfeit the bequest. The will was a promise based on a *condition*. The condition had to be *met* to get the inheritance.

It is this latter way that the expert in the law thought. That becomes clear in his question, "What must *I do* to inherit eternal life?" The lawyer thinks that he has to meet conditions stipulated in God's will. So, when Jesus asks him what he thinks those stipulations are, he replies with the Golden Rule. "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, Love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus *agrees* with the lawyer's answer. "Do this *and* you will live." Eternal life *depends* upon doing the law. Of course, Paul adds, "*If* the inheritance depends upon the law, *then* it no longer depends on a promise."<sup>ii</sup> *If* heaven no longer depends upon God's promise, *then* you have to *meet* the conditions *to get* the inheritance.

### Part II, a

When the lawyer heard that, he wanted to "justify himself." That is, he wanted to cover his bases; to make sure that he met the conditions. So he asks Jesus to clarify who his neighbor is.

Jesus clarifies by telling him of a traveler. This man is on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he is jumped by bandits. They "strip him of his clothes, beat him up, and leave him for dead." Here was a man, a nameless man, in need of help. Jesus' point is that a neighbor is anyone – named or nameless, friend or stranger – anyone in need with whom we may come in contact.

Where do we find such a neighbor? We find such a neighbor beginning with our family and friends to coworkers and classmates to the stranger on the street and in the news. They may be the kids you are raising or an ailing family member. They may be a lonely neighbor or a depressed neighbor; an abused

child or a battered spouse. They may be close to home or in far away places...like Egypt.

In that light, reports have been coming out of Egypt that Christians have become the target of violence. Some reports state that dozens of Christian churches have been destroyed. In some cases Christians have been the direct target of violence. The point is, that's where we find our neighbor. We find him in anyone who is in need.

#### Part II, b

That's what happens in Jesus' story. Two religious leaders, a priest and a Levite, each find the traumatized man. Each one has every opportunity to a first responder. The right thing to do was to stop and give assistance. Neither of them did it. Maybe they were averse to the bloody mess; worried about a financial commitment; feared the bandits. Whatever their case may have been they gave no help.

Can we see ourselves in the priest and Levite? Think of, for example, when you are a part of a conversation that turns to gossip. Gossip strips a neighbor of his dignity; beats him up with hurtful words and leaves his reputation sullied. When we find ourselves in such a conversation, what do we do? Do we come to the help of our neighbor in need? More often than not, we pass by nodding our heads in agreement. We don't want to run the risk of losing face.

Or, what about situations that involve more risk and cost; an infirm neighbor, an abused neighbor, a stranded motorist? How often don't we argue, "If I get involved, it will make a dent in my pocketbook; I can't afford it. If I get involved, I will take a big chunk of my time; I have my own life to live. If I get involved, it will be a risk to my health; it's not worth it."

The Large Catechism gets to the heart of the matter; if you see anyone in peril and do not help him, though you have the means and ways to help, you are guilty. It will be of no help to you to use the excuse that you did not cause their peril, for you have *withheld* your love from them.<sup>iii</sup>

#### Part II, c

That's what the priest and Levite did, but, then, along comes the Samaritan. Samaritans were people for whom many of the Israelites felt contempt. They held prejudices toward the Samaritans; thought of them as good for nothing. Yet, this good for nothing Samaritan, not the revered priest and Levite, took pity and did something about the traumatized man. He got *his* hands bloody and took care of the man's trauma, *even though* it was a risk to his

own life. He used *his* oil and wine and forked out money at the inn, *even though* it came from his own pocketbook.

Then Jesus asks the lawyer a question, “Which of the three was a neighbor to the man?” The lawyer balks at the answer, even though he knows it. He does because it goes against everything in him to utter the word “Samaritan.” So he says, “The *one* who showed mercy.” Now Jesus is ready to drive home his point, “Go and do likewise.” Holding the Samaritan up *as* a standard to follow, rubbed the lawyer the wrong way.

We are not unfamiliar with that, are we? After all, we live in a cosmopolitan community. There are people of all different races and cultures; skin colors and customs; languages and social standings. We come in contact with them daily – at work, in school, on the street. It is easy to have misunderstandings of them; to form negative opinions of them. It is easy to lump the all together; to say they are all the same!

...and we don’t even have to go that far. We often can have feelings like this; “There is that neighbor down the street, who rubs me the wrong way; that fellow Christian, who gets under my skin; that family member, who put me out.”

When we have such feelings of contempt, it is not within us to “go and do likewise.” Nor is it within us to “go and do likewise,” when we withhold our love from a neighbor in need. *That’s* the point. We *can’t* meet the laws conditions. So Paul wrote, “If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would have certainly come by the law.<sup>iv</sup>” But the law can’t impart life. It can’t help us meet its stipulations. It just is not possible.

### Part III

What purpose does the law have, then? Paul answers, “The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.<sup>v</sup>” To put it another way, the law leads us to Jesus. So, you might ask, how does Jesus story tell do that?

A church father gives us some help here.<sup>vi</sup> He pointed out that in the man left for dead we have a picture of Adam. When God created Adam, he clothed him in the best of threads. He dressed him in holiness and righteousness. Adam was, therefore, gloriously and handsomely dressed. He had the *ability* to love his neighbor his neighbor as himself.

As Adam was going along his way in Paradise, the devil jumped him like a bandit. He did by deceiving Adam to disobey God. When that happened, the devil stripped Adam of his glorious righteous clothing, beat him up and left him for dead before God. What happened to Adam, happened to us all, everyone of us. In Adam we were all stripped of our righteous clothing and left for dead.

Then along come the priest and the Levite. They picture for us the law. The law says, "Be a good neighbor. Treat others as you would be treated. Put away your prejudices. Put yourself out for other. You can do it. You can do what the law says. You can be a loving neighbor." But no matter how hard you try, you *can't* meet the laws conditions. Neither is the law able to *help* us meet them. It can only pass us by, leaving us helpless and dying.

Finally, along comes the Samaritan, Jesus. He takes pity on us; and goes into action. He is "the One who showed mercy"; and how he did! There was no risk so great that would make him pass you by; to be sure, he did *more* than risk, he gave his life. There was no cost so great that kept him from committing to help you; to be sure, he committed *not* with gold or silver, *but* with his holy precious blood. So, Jesus got down on his hands and knees. He got bloodied with your sin; was beaten and bruised in your place.

By his stripes he got the oil and wine, *the medicine*, you need...and, where does Jesus give you that medicine? He gives it to you in word and sacrament. By means of them, he pours the soothing ointment of the gospel on your bloodied and bruised soul. "By his stripes (you) are healed.<sup>vii</sup>" He dresses your stripped sinful nature with his righteousness. "You are clothed in My righteousness that I wove for you by My perfect life."

Finally, he takes you to the inn; to the church for hospital care. It reminds me of what Martin Luther said about the church. "The church is a hospital and everyone who enters in its doors is sick." That's what each one of us is; traumatized by the devil; left for dead; unable to help ourselves...So it is that Jesus brings you in here. He stoops down and cares for you. His care for you gives you a new perspective on your neighbor. Your neighbor is someone in need just like you are; in need of Jesus just like you are. You are in need of Jesus who cares for you till he comes to give you your inheritance.

...and Jesus gives you your inheritance, by giving you that with which you cannot comply. He promises it freely *without* any conditions attached. He does because he met them for you since you can't. That's why the inheritance depends upon God's promise, not the law. He first gave that promise to you at the font. There he adopted you as his own in the waters of baptism. He continues to give you that promise here at this altar. He does as he gives you his body and blood. By means of them he, in effect says, "I bequeath heaven to you." Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> References from the text (NKJV) will not be cited in the sermon

<sup>ii</sup> Galatians 3.18

1. <sup>iii</sup> *Large Catechism*, Fifth Commandment, paragraph 190 *condensed*, Kolb/Wengert edition

<sup>iv</sup> Galatians 3.21

<sup>v</sup> Galatians 3.22

<sup>vi</sup> The following paragraphs are a paraphrase from *Postilla, Vol 2*, Trinity 13, by Johann Gerhard, Repristination Press

