

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 10.23-37

September 6, 2020

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

We cry out from the ditch, “Jesus, help!” At least, we would if we truly recognized our plight.

The man in the ditch is us. Collectively, humanity has been robbed.

There are two ways to look at the human race’s fall into sin:

One way is to see man as guilty. Our first parents sinned, and God punishes them.

The other way is to see primitive man as innocent and childlike. The devil deceived and robbed him.

In either case, there are disastrous consequences for the whole human race. The views complement each other. Man is guilty; and, man has been assaulted by the devil.

God endowed man with greater things than the animals. God made us for communion with Himself. He bestowed upon us righteousness. He gave us a conscience – an innate sense of the good. Assaulted as by robbers, we are damaged: stripped of righteousness, the conscience defective, knowledge of God darkened.

All this is told by Jesus in story form: **“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”** Man went down, *Anthropos* went down, Adam went down. The journey was from Jerusalem to Jericho – i.e., away from the city of peace, from the city of God down to the city of man.

The story is told to a man who wants to justify himself, i.e., to excuse his limited love, and find a righteousness within himself. Righteousness is a theological concept, a Bible word describing being right with God. But it is present in everyone's everyday ideas about life. From the riots in the street to the angry emails on our computers, there is an incessant demand for justice. "He had no right!" "She's lying!" "He's a racist!" "She's a hypocrite!"

All of it is a cry for justice. "No justice, no peace" is not just a chant in the streets; we are willing to make someone's life hell if we feel we've been wronged.

The parable of the Good Samaritan was designed by Jesus to shock. Jesus deliberately chooses the most disliked character as the hero – a Samaritan. It's so distasteful that the lawyer at the end won't answer Jesus' question directly. "Who was neighbor to the man in the ditch?" The simple answer would be, "The Samaritan." But the lawyer can only choke out, "The one who showed mercy."

How would Jesus retell the parable to you? Make the most scandalous character the hero. "A man went down to Portland, and there he fell among thieves. And finally a police officer came to his aid. Or what if you make it someone from Antifa or BLM? Trump, or Biden? Or choose someone closer to home, someone in your personal life who is giving you grief, whom you have made your enemy.

The parable isn't designed at the primary level to make you try harder. It's to point out your hypocrisy. You're not righteous. You don't love your neighbor.

You exclude from your obligation to love the person you think is your enemy. That could be a political enemy, an ethnic enemy, or somebody on the PTL or Church Council who has different ideas from you.

Jesus tells the parable in such a way that we cannot be justified, not by ourselves. We are the man in the ditch. All mankind is in the ditch. A few weeks ago, the Tax Collector in Jesus' parable went home justified because He looked outside himself, saying, **"God be merciful to me, a sinner."**

Today the justification comes without a word – for the man in the ditch says nothing. He is beaten, groaning, bleeding, dying.

He's wounded, and so are we. You know how the wounds look in you. Resentment; mistrust; lust; greed; sniping; gossiping; assuming the worst; lazy; selfish; quick to complain; slow to pray; squandering your blessings day after day.

The *language* of justification is forensic, legal, a declaration. The *picture* of justification, however, in a parable like the Good Samaritan is one of healing. What wounds in your soul need to be healed?

Baptism makes us like little children. And like little children, we have growing up to do. Consider the pattern of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In Ch. 2 man is declared dead in trespasses and sins. But **"even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ"** [2:5]. The dead can't make themselves alive. The wounded man cannot get himself out of the ditch. God does the rescue work. St. Paul provides the theological language for that in Eph. 2:8: **"By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."**

Jesus brings us to the inn – i.e., He brings us to the Church – for healing. Restored to health, He urges us to get up and start walking. "I urge you," Paul says in Eph. 4, **"to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"** [vv1-3].

From there, the healed one begins to grow; the child matures. Paul continues:

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. [4:13-15]

In other words, Christ has a plan for the man in the ditch. It's a plan of rescue, restoration, healing. My soul needs healing. I bet yours does too.

How are we healed? For two millennia, pastors have tried to identify the oil and wine in the parable, along with the two coins in the Inn. The oil is for Baptism, the wine is for the Lord's Supper; the two coins are Law and Gospel, or Old and New Testaments, or Word and Sacraments. All are good answers, but I think the real point is that our healing is found in the things that Jesus gives. He supplies the donkey, the oil, the wine, the coins. Healing our souls comes from staying with Him, staying close to His gifts.

We cry out from the ditch, "Jesus, help!" And He does. Keep on crying out. The Lord will answer. +INJ+

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

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