

Judica

St. John 8:46-59

March 29, 2020

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

“Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

Strangely, Jesus issues a rebuttal for only half of this insult. **“I do not have a demon.”** But He says nothing about not being a Samaritan.

Now of course, Jesus isn't a Samaritan. His mother, Mary, is Jewish, and Jesus is born in Bethlehem of Judea and raised in Nazareth of Galilee. So why doesn't Jesus reject being a Samaritan as well?

Here there is a mystery hidden for us in the Scriptures. For the word *Samaritan* in Hebrew means “keeper,” like a guardian – a protector of the people. It appears in Psalm 121, where God is the Samaritan, God is the keeper, guardian, protector: **“He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper”**

(Ps. 121:3-5).

It is as though Jesus says, “You say rightly that I am a Samaritan. For I am Your keeper. I will guard you in the time of pestilence. I will keep you safe from the contagion that hangs over you. Though you are anxious in the night, and worry, I who keep Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. I am your keeper, I am your good shepherd, I am your guardian who keeps watch over you. Therefore let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Behold, there is more to this mystery. Jesus does not deny that He is a Samaritan, so we will know that He is the rescuer who appears when the priests and Levites have failed. He is the Good Samaritan who rescues the man left for dead.

Who is that man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho? He is Adam, he is mankind, he is us. Man left his place in the city of God, and went down to make his own city, where man would reign in place of God.

Now man is wounded. We are dying. This coronavirus—novel though they may name it—is nothing new. If you run a search for “pestilence” in the Hebrew Scriptures you’ll find that the plague is not just a middle-ages kind of problem. Contagions brought down Roman emperors and terrified Palestinian shepherds alike. We dwell in the land of the shadow of death.

We thought we were safe. We thought that the government and the doctors could save us. The quarantines are good reminders that death is invisible, it is lurking, and it will find us, one way or another.

But He who is our keeper, He who is our Samaritan, comes down to breathe in our poisoned atmosphere. He goes into the ditch. He braves every terror that haunts us. We left Him, but He comes to find us. We rejected Him, but He makes Himself neighbor to us. He does not practice social distancing.

Here is His promise. **“If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”**

Keep sounds like *obey*. And that throws me right back into the ditch. **“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it,”** says St. James (2:10). The one who does not keep the Law will die.

But Jesus “is speaking here not about the word of the Law, but of the Gospel” (Luther, LW 76, p411). Dr. Luther gave us a simple way to remember the difference between the Law and the Gospel. “The Law says, ‘Do this,’ and it is never done. The Gospel says, ‘Believe this,’ and everything is done already.”

How can we keep Christ’s Word? We hang onto what He said: “Father, forgive them.” “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven.... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given unto you.” Your righteousness, your keeping of the Law is never enough. His righteousness is a gift to you. You can’t earn it. But you can keep it. That’s what the word *Amen* means: “Yes! It’s mine. Gift received. I will keep this and treasure it all my days. Thank you.”

You have that Word. So the promise is for you. Be not anxious. Be not afraid. Jesus says you shall never see death.

How can that be? I've seen my father die, I've seen my friends die, and I know I must die too. What does Jesus mean, I shall never see death?

The Scriptures speak of death as a sleep, one with no frightening thoughts, no terrors of the night. Though the world counts it as death, the soul is alive, and the body waits for the resurrection.

Remember what Jesus said to the penitent rebel: "Today you will be with me in paradise." And the body which sleeps? It shall rise again.

Jesus is our Samaritan. Jesus is your Samaritan. He is your keeper. You need not fear the pestilence that stalks the world.

Your job may be in peril. Your retirement may now be in shambles. But He who made bread in the wilderness, will He not give you your daily bread?

Your Samaritan, your Jesus, comes into your ditch, takes your place, and says, "Judge Me." That's the name of this Sunday: *Judica me*. Judge me. It comes from Psalm 43. There it means *Vindicate me, plead my cause*.

But Jesus the sinless one comes to stand beside you, and says to the Father, "Judge Me instead. Judge Me, and let this one go free."

That's the Word you keep. Hold onto it, never let it go. And be not afraid, come what may. For your Jesus is your keeper. He will never let you go.

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