

Jesus the Healer

Preached on The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
Trinity Anglican Church, WRJ
August 29, 2021
Text: Lk 10: 23-37

We have heard the parable of the Good Samaritan numerous times. It is one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. And its familiarity can take the edge off of it and give it that well-worn feel of moral reasonableness. There is a man who is attacked by robbers while traveling on the road toward Jericho. He is beaten and left on the side of the road half-dead. Two men walk by and avoid him. But the third one stops and helps him. Jesus tells us to be like that third man. Go and do likewise. End of story. Even in the post-Christian West, we are still formed by a morality in large part rooted in the teachings of Jesus. It is part of our moral patrimony, even for committed secularists. We even have Good Samaritan laws.

So when we look at this parable, we typically conclude that the point is to show us what a good neighbor does. This isn't completely wrong by any means. But notice that our specific Gospel reading begins with Verse 23:

“Then turning to the disciples he said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.’”

Many modern Bibles have little subheadings to break up the text into what scholars call “pericopes.” These are little sections that are considered to be a coherent unit or thought. Contemporary Bibles usually break off the opening two verses of today’s Gospel—verses 22 and 23 above—because they seem (to us) to belong in the section before Jesus’s interaction with the lawyer. Then verses 25-37 are placed, not surprisingly, under the heading “The parable of the Good Samaritan.” But it is important to remember that this division is not in the text of scripture itself; it is something used by the editors to help with reading. Our Gospel this morning, however, predates verse numbers, chapter numbers, or pericope headings. In other words, the Church Fathers thought that these two verses are an important introduction to the parable. Here Jesus is making an important point about himself and about Scripture—namely, that it is all about him! The Fathers always assumed that Scripture has a Christological meaning, a meaning that teaches us something about Christ, even when the surface meaning appears to be about something else. Hence, it might aid us to follow their example and see our reading as having a Christ-centered meaning, not merely a moralistic one.

The reading continues with Jesus’s exchange with the lawyer.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "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 he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

Now this certainly seems to support a moralistic reading; that is, a plea that we improve our moral conduct. The lawyer comes to Jesus with a question about salvation, and Jesus answers with the Law! If a person came to any of us asking, "What must I do to be saved?" we would probably point him to Jesus. We would tell him to repent and be baptized. But that's not what Jesus does. He doesn't say "Follow me and you shall live." In fact, when the man responds with the Summary of the Law that we recite most every Sunday, Jesus reaffirms his conclusion. So what is going on? Do the moralists have it right after all? Why would Jesus answer with the Law rather than with the Gospel?

Verse 29 gives us a clue: "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" The man is a student of the Law and gives a stereotypical legal answer. He wants to justify himself by finding a technicality. He is looking for a loophole. He knows that loving one's neighbor is difficult; so he seeks to limit his liability to God's law by finding a narrow definition of "neighbor." The parable is Jesus's response to this man's attempted self-justification.

What Jesus wants the man to see is the impossibility of truly keeping the Law. No human through his or her own power can be perfectly righteous. If we exercise any moral imagination at all, then we know this is true. Whoever thinks God should save him because of his perfect keeping of the Law is deluded. Our failure to keep the Law is what we must admit if we are honest. The lawyer just came face-to-face in this parable with how high a standard God's Law really sets. Indeed, the Law is *always* accusing us. It always shows us that we fail to live up to its standards. The lawyer wanted to justify himself; Jesus kicked away his self-justification.

It is unlikely that the lawyer walked away from this encounter encouraged to be a better man. He probably left being highly discouraged. But exposing his futile attempt at self-justification was the most merciful thing Jesus could have done for him. Self-justification is absolute poison because it prevents us from repenting. It prevents us from coming to Christ begging for *his* mercy. You see, the lawyer wasn't the Good Samaritan in the parable, nor are we. We are the beaten, bloody, and dying traveler, unable to save ourselves. Jesus is the Good Samaritan.

It is quite like God to turn our cultural views upside down. This parable would not have been received well by the Jews of Jesus's day. It would have been one thing for Jesus to tell a story where the priest, the Levite, or even a devout man of the Jewish faith was the helper and hero. The Jewish faith was full of commands to help the wounded and save those who were dying. But the hero of the parable is the despised Samaritan. In many ways Jesus is like him. He is rejected by many in Israel. He is considered

unorthodox and slack in the observances which many Jews, especially the religious elite, see as essential. (In fact, Jesus's adversaries called him a Samaritan on several occasions as a form of abuse.) He certainly didn't fit the prevailing idea of what the Messiah would be like. And last, he came to help those who were his enemies.

So the Good Samaritan is a good representative of Christ. Like the Good Samaritan, Jesus heals us, pouring the oil of his Spirit and the wine of his blood into our spiritual and moral wounds. Jesus paid for our care with his own life on the cross. Jesus is the one who shows mercy. Only Jesus showed absolute love to his neighbors, to us, even while we were enemies of God, dead in our sins. This fulfillment of the Law is why, like the disciples, we have blessed eyes. We have seen the Savior. We have what all the prophets and patriarchs and kings of old longed to see. Not even Abraham, Elijah, or David loved God with all their hearts, souls, strength, and minds. None of the saints have ever completely loved their neighbor as themselves. No one has kept the Law in perfect righteousness except the Lord Jesus Christ.

To follow Jesus is to become more like him. It is to see the humanity in everyone, including our enemies. As we assume his perspective, we come to see everyone as the offspring of the same Father in heaven. We are *all* created in the image of God and so deserve to be treated as valuable. As we are transformed into Christ's image, we see everyone as a beloved child of God, beautifully and wonderfully made and of great worth.

We can only become this way through the grace of God. He gives us the Spiritual oil and wine that cleanses the wounds of our sins and enables us to indeed get better. Jesus crafts us more and more into his image as we obey his commandments. We start to live up to our name, "Christians," little Christs. And then, when the Good Samaritan looks at us with his mercy, the mercy we ourselves have seen at his hands, and says "Go, and do thou likewise," we can say, "Yes, Lord."

In the Name...