

Luke 10:25-37: <sup>25</sup>And behold, a lawyer stood up to put [Jesus] to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup>He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” <sup>27</sup>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.” <sup>28</sup>And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup>But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup>Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ <sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” <sup>37</sup>He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

### “The Good Neighbor”

The text for today’s message is the Gospel reading from St. Luke, the tenth chapter, but I would like to read again the last two verses...

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

#### INTRODUCTION

I think all of you would agree: we live in a society that’s losing its sense of neighborliness. Big front porches used to be the thing to have—so you could see your neighbors. Now, big back decks are the thing, so you can be away from your neighbors.

Then there’s the 19 year-old thief who was awarded \$74,000 and medical expenses in a lawsuit because his neighbor ran over his hand with his car. You see, the thief didn’t notice that his neighbor was at the wheel of the car as he was trying to steal its hubcaps.

Likewise, virtually every state in the Union has enacted what are called “Good Samaritan” laws. These laws are intended to protect people—especially medical professionals—from being sued by accident victims when they stop to render aid in an emergency.

Political correctness hasn’t made us better neighbors, either. The recent tragedy in Orlando may very well have been prevented if people who knew what the assailant had in mind wouldn’t have been afraid of being called “Islamaphobes.” It’s to the point where we’re too afraid to speak up and tell the truth in love, and thus help people.

And there are Homeland Security rules that allow government officials to force people to give aid in times of emergency. This is a profound demonstration both of government overreach and of our lost sense of helping a neighbor in need.

Such behavior isn’t new. Christ’s Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us today that...

A HEART WITHOUT CHRIST IS A NEIGHBOR TO FEW, BUT A HEART FILLED WITH  
CHRIST IS A NEIGHBOR TO ALL, ESPECIALLY THE NEIGHBOR IN NEED.

I. The Lawyer’s first question: What is the purpose of the Law?

How many people here are familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan? That’s tells you just how masterful a teacher Jesus is.

Luke tells us that an “expert in the law”—in other words, a lawyer—stood up to test Jesus. Now we shouldn’t read too much into this “testing” because it wouldn’t be unusual for a Jewish lawyer to ask questions of a Jewish Rabbi. But it’s possible that the this learned man was objecting to what Jesus had said previously: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” (Lk 10:21).

So, the lawyer asks Jesus: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” At the foundation of this question was the notion that eternal life must be a reward of merit, of good works. The lawyer’s question, then, was an attempt to define what those works were.

The Lawyer, along with many of his countrymen, had taken the Torah—the Five Books of Moses, God’s Word of grace to His chosen people—and turned it into a “how-to” book on earning God’s favor. In the Torah, inheritance of eternal life is something God gives by grace; in the thinking of the Pharisees, it was something you earned by works.

## II. Christ answers with a question.

Jesus masterfully answers the lawyer’s question with a pair of questions of His own. His intent is to paint the lawyer into a corner—to make him think more deeply about the nature of the Law. He asks, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”

The lawyer’s answer summarizes the whole Old Testament: “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.” “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live,” Jesus said. Jesus is saying that if salvation does come by way of the Law, only the one who fulfills the Law can obtain it.

And to fulfill the law, one must love not only God, but his neighbor perfectly.

## III. The second question from the Lawyer

Jesus has painted the lawyer fairly tightly into a corner and the lawyer needed a way out—a way to justify himself—a way to prove that he can inherit eternal life by his own keeping of the Law.

But he knows that if he claims to love God, he should love his neighbor, as well—the two go together like a hand and glove—you can't love God and not your neighbor. So, like a good lawyer, he asks Jesus for a clarification—a legal loophole: “And who is my neighbor?”

IV. Christ answers with a parable.

So, Jesus answers with the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Now, The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a dangerous 21 miles. Jesus doesn't tell the lawyer anything about the man who left Jerusalem for Jericho, just that he was “a man”. The robbers leave him half-dead—without help, he would soon be fully dead. Two Jews—a priest and a Levite—happen upon the man. The priest sees him but passes by on the other side. The Levite takes a closer look, but then he also passes by on the other side.

Jesus doesn't say why these two men didn't stop to help. Perhaps the priest thought the man was dead and he would be made ceremonially unclean if he touched him. Perhaps the Levite didn't want to embarrass the priest. Perhaps both men were afraid to stop and render assistance lest the same thing happened to them. Perhaps they thought somebody else would help.

Whatever their reasons, they didn't want to be a good neighbor to this man in profound need.

Perhaps their reasons are the same as our reasons when we don't want to help someone in need: “I don't have time.” “I don't have the resources.” “I'll be late for work.” “This is a bad part of town.” “I'm sure someone else will stop and help.” “That's what we have shelters for.” “I don't want to get involved and end up getting sued.”

What we do know is this: the lawyer loved his own people—fellow Jews—these were his neighbors. But he would've hated the Samaritans. They were half-breeds and idolaters—sinners in his eyes—such people were not his neighbors. Yet Jesus parades the priest and Levite—Jews of the highest order—as loveless and indifferent.

And the person this lawyer most hated was the hero of the story.

The Samaritan comes to the man's aid. He doesn't seem to care about his own well-being or safety, he doesn't hesitate to dress and bandage the man's wounds. He takes the time to take the injured man to the nearest inn for recuperation. And he's not selfish with his money—he even pays for the man's stay so as not to burden the innkeeper.

At the end of the parable, Jesus answers the lawyer's question, "And who is my neighbor?" with a question of his own, but He turns it around: "<sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers." "If you were the half-dead man, who would've been your neighbor?" And the lawyer answers without mentioning the word "Samaritan": "The one who showed him mercy." "You go, and do likewise." Jesus says.

V. Christ is the Good Samaritan to us; through Him we are good Samaritans to others.

Jesus didn't use this parable to show this lawyer how to be a better neighbor, or how to inherit eternal life, but to show him how far he had fallen short of the Law's demands for perfect love. He couldn't "go and do likewise" because he didn't love his neighbor as himself—so, how could he love God with all his being, either?

It's the same problem for us. How can we "go and do likewise"? Every time we refuse to share our wealth with the poor, stop to render aid because we're too busy, or think, "they deserve what they're getting," or consider ourselves better than others because of where we live or who they are, "we're not being good neighbors." The Law shows us that our love is flawed.

But the hero this parable is really Jesus Christ. He's the Good Samaritan. He's the Good Neighbor to the person in need—and as sinners, that's everyone of us!

St. Paul says of his fellow Jews in Romans (10:1–4): "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal

for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Paul says, "Christ is the end of the law..." Not in the sense of "end" like the "end" of a book, but the sense of "end" as in the sense of completion or "fulfillment"—"Christ is the fulfillment of the Law because He alone has loved God and neighbor perfectly.

He is the Good Samaritan—the Good Neighbor—who sacrificed all He had to pour God's mercy into our wounds. His earthly ministry was one of love and compassion for the unlovable and the sinner.

Unlike the man in the parable who was "half-dead", we're fully dead in our trespasses and sins. In this condition, we simply cannot love God with our whole being, or our neighbor as ourselves. But Jesus came to rescue us. He allowed Himself to be beaten and crucified on a cross so His blood could heal our wounds and wash away our sins. It is Jesus who carries us to the inn of heavenly grace and healing.

In baptism, Christ dwells in you and you in Him. And where Jesus is, there is His love—love for God and love for neighbor. Apart from Christ, you can do no good thing—you can't be good neighbors. At best, your sinful hearts are neighborly only to those whom you like—or look like you.

But Christ the Good Neighbor lives in you and the love you need to fulfill the Law He gives to us through His Word and Sacrament. You, who were once dead in trespasses and sins, are made a living and loving people of God by the healing love of Jesus.

## Conclusion

As baptized believers in Christ, you are under God's protection. You have nothing to fear in reaching out to others. Not loss of wealth, not embarrassment, not injury, not lawsuits, not fear of those who criticize you for speaking the truth in love, not even death itself.

You are heirs with Christ of eternal life—a wealth that surpasses all others—and the love of Christ fills your hearts and makes you Good Neighbors.

Christianity changed the world—not through war or political intrigue—but through the love of Jesus that lives in the hearts of His people, a love that sees all people as children of God—and seeks their well-being.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.