

Do Nothing and Live!

5th Sun. after Pent. – 07/13/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 10:25-37 Pastor Keith Besel

v.29, **“But [the lawyer – that is, an ‘expert’ in the God’s Law], desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”**

Introduction

- ✘ My fellow believers in Christ, whenever we focus our attention upon one of Jesus’ parables in Holy Scripture, we must always give careful attention to understand why He’s sharing that particular parable. Failure to do so, has led to countless false and dangerous conclusions about the lesson Jesus intends for us to receive.
 - ➔ And this very famous parable today about “The Good Samaritan” is a perfect example of that. Countless people, and even entire church bodies, have completely ignored the context of this story and concluded that Jesus’ primary intent is that we hear His words in verse 37, “You go, and do likewise” as being the main message of this story. So they then get about the task of trying to justify themselves before God, by living as the Good Samaritan.
- ✘ But a more faithful look at the actual words around this parable show us that this lawyer; this expert in the Law or Torah of Moses, is not coming to Jesus with good intentions. Verse 25 says that he comes “to put [Jesus] to the test;” to tempt Him.
 - ➔ In fact, the lawyer is doing the very thing Jesus says not to do when He says to the devil in the wilderness: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (Lk. 4:12).

I. Like the lawyer, our old Adam tries to justify himself

- ✘ Actually, it’s even worse than that. The lawyer asks a follow-up question, not because he really wants to know who his neighbor is; not because he wants to know how best to love his neighbor or even how to be the best neighbor he can possibly be. No, verse 29 says again, “he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”
 - ➔ That tells us right there that this is no innocent question. This actually has to do with the doctrine that faithful Christians have said for centuries is the central teaching “upon which the Church stands or falls”; the doctrine of “justification.”
- ✘ So a close inspection of the text reveals that verses 29 and 33, are the true keys to the whole thing!
 - ➔ What does that term “justify” mean? “To be proclaimed righteous” (AP V, 131). It means to be declared innocent of all charges before God. It’s correct then to say that “justification is the forgiveness of sins” (AP V, 169).
 - ➔ And at the time of the Reformation, in the Augsburg Confession our Lutheran forefathers said, “People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight” (AC IV, 2–3).
- ✘ So, to understand Jesus’ parable correctly, you can’t lose sight of this! It has everything to do with the questions that this lawyer asks Jesus. He is not just asking innocent questions for the sake of getting some new information. No, he’s putting Jesus to the test in order to make himself righteous with God.
 - ➔ But anyone that has paid any kind of attention to God throughout the Old Testament and Jesus in the Gospels, knows that you and I are not justified; we are not proclaimed innocent, or

forgiven by ourselves. It all has to do with what Jesus does for you and not, thank the Lord, what you do for Jesus or for your neighbor.

- ✧ Though, I get it. That's hard for all of us to remember because the old Adam; that is our own sinful flesh is always trying; always wanting to justify ourselves before God. As Martin Luther once said in a serious jest, "Even though the old Adam has been drowned in our baptism, that dreadful guy is still a good swimmer." Every day we are fighting against our own flesh; our own body; our own mind; our own desires that keeps tempting and pulling at us to follow the path of sin and rebellion against God. Paul says in Galatians 5:19, "The works of the flesh are evident."

➔ It's true, our old Adam is very religious in his sin. He buys into the lie that the devil first said to Eve in the Garden, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). So he runs around with a lawyer's mentality, dividing good from evil, but doing so according to his standards instead of God's. We see this every day around us and even when we look in the mirror; we and everyone else working, striving according to our own homespun righteousness.

- ✧ When you get down to it, this lawyer, just like the old Adam inside of us all, keeps trying to find some way; some angle for getting right with God, but doing so apart from God. You see, he wants to make his own law; his own path so that he can determine how to get to God without leaving his own comfort zone or sinful ways.

➔ In essence this adds sin to sin; breaking God's Law while turning away from God at the same time. When Jesus said in verse 28, "Do this, and you will live", the man has no intention of obeying Jesus. And that's the point. Jesus knows that no man, except for Himself could ever do what He is commanding. Paul says in Romans 3:20, "By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

- ✧ And it's in that sinful state that we, like the lawyer, keep searching for the easiest way, for the standard that is the bare minimum; for the loophole that gets us around the law. So the man asked, "Who's my neighbor?" Who indeed?

➔ This man knew, just as you and I know who it is to whom we are supposed to be the good neighbor. And maybe you are – to their faces. But deep inside we are still calculating: "This girl," "that guy" isn't my neighbor because she's that way; he's this way; they did this terrible thing; wronging me beyond my ability to love; beyond how far I think I can go to be a neighbor.

➔ And then, like the sin-soaked lawyer inside of us all, we get to work – working the law that we've set up in our own minds; rationalizing and bending things to explain how we deserve forgiveness; how God and I are "good" because ... well, because I say that we are good.

➔ Yet, none of this may have anything to do with the Lord. Look, we do it so often that we don't even realize it! Like the lawyer in Jesus' day we are confident in our own idea of truth: "Of course we Jews don't have to love Samaritans! But, wait ... what did Jesus just say in that parable? A Samaritan loved a Jew?" Did you see how, in verse 37, the lawyer couldn't say the name "Samaritan"? All he could say was, "The one who showed mercy."

II. Justification thru the ultimate Good Samaritan

- ✧ But that's the clue right there. Jesus led him to the right answer; the proper understanding of His parable, yet the question remains: "Did that lawyer even understand his own words?"

➔ Because, who is the only one who has ever; that has always shown that kind of mercy to all people? Who is it alone that justifies those who are beaten down by sin; robbed of any means of survival by their own guilt and left for dead by the deceiver; by the devil whose only goal is to use people for his own gain and then eat them up and spit them out on the side of the road?

- ✘ That's right, it's Jesus Christ alone. He doesn't just walk on by like the self-righteous priest or Levite. But He gets down and dirty with each and every sinner, assessing our situation honestly, personally and with compassion.
 - ➔ To sinners Jesus says, "Yes, you are guilty." And to sinners who want to justify themselves by parading their works before Him, He says, "Do this, and you will live" (v. 28). "Go, and do likewise" (v. 37). In other words, if you want to ignore Me and live by the law, then it is by your own law that you will fail and you will die. Martin Luther said in the Heidelberg Disputation, "The Law says, 'Do this,' and it is never done" (*Luther's Works*, 31:41).
 - ✘ You see, the Law doesn't give life. What help did the priest and Levite in the parable provide for the man in need of healing and life? None. So also the works that the lawyer was hoping to employ and likewise our old Adam who wants to think that it's the things we've done or not done that makes us a person with a saving faith. Paul says in Galatians 2:21, "If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."
 - ✘ Friends, you and I are justified souls today only by faith in what Christ has done for us. Luther continued in the Heidelberg Disputation, where "the Law says, 'Do this,' and it is never done." "Faith says, 'Believe in Christ,' and everything is already done."
 - ➔ The answer to your sins is Jesus' blood shed on Jesus' cross. Against your works it is His good works done in your place; credited to your account; received by faith alone! There is no alternative. It's either by works or by faith that you are saved. If it's through faith and works that you try to get right with God, then your focus on the works undoes the work of Christ. Romans 3:28 is clear, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."
 - ✘ It is only Jesus; the one rejected by the Jews; the one called a traitor and fraud by the religious elite; the one hated to the point of crucifixion and death; only Jesus comes down off of the "righteous road" and into the weeds with us destitute, dead and dying sinners. Why? To have "compassion" (v.33) with us in our sin-beaten state; to treat us with His completely free and healing gifts.
 - ➔ You haven't, and you never can, earn those life-giving gifts of Word and Sacrament. You don't deserve them. Yet Jesus gives them to you exactly because you can't earn them; because you are unworthy and in desperate need of them.
 - ➔ As it was with oil and wine that the Samaritan used to treat the battered man in the parable, so it is with Jesus when He treats your sin-wounded souls in His holy Supper. He bathes and binds your hearts and minds with His healing gifts of forgiveness and grace. He stops your bleeding ways with His own blood. He brings you back to life with the flesh that He gave in your place on the cross. And He cleanses your souls through and through with the saving water and Word poured out over you in your baptism each and every day!
- ## Conclusion
- ✘ These are things that today's text is all about, because Jesus told this parable to a lawyer who wanted to justify himself; who wanted to gain life by his own deeds.
 - ➔ But Jesus – He's the true Good Samaritan in this parable. He's the one who justifies you and makes you right with God the Father forevermore! It's when we do nothing; when we are nursed and cared for by the mercy and compassion; by the works of Jesus alone that we truly live at peace with our God.
 - ➔ Paul's words in Romans 4:5 are a fitting interpretation and close to our time with this parable today. "And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly" (that's Jesus), his faith (in Jesus) is counted as righteousness." In the name of Jesus. Amen.