

July 13, 2025

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

“Abiding in the Gospel; Abiding in Love”

Luke 10:25-37

As a pastor you almost feel obligated to preach on the parable of the good Samaritan whenever it comes around in the lectionary just because everybody seems to know it. There are all sorts of opinions about it and many different ways you can preach on it. Ambrose of Milan went nuts with allegory giving a specific identity to everything in the parable, including the inn at the very end as being the Christian church. I’ve always kind of gravitated toward Jesus’ question at the end, “Which of these was a neighbor...?” and pondered in some serious self-reflection, and I think that is what Christ intended.

But something new jumped out at me when I started going at it this time around. This lawyer who questions Jesus...I think he’s Lutheran! Hear me out. He seems to genuinely be a man of faith. He is not putting Jesus to the test to try and trip Jesus up. He truly is seeking eternal life and questions Jesus to that end. And, as Lutherans do, he has outstanding systematic theology. Jesus asks what Scripture says about the question and this guy answers flawlessly: “*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 you neighbor as yourself.*” And then the man wants to “justify himself” and I think that really just mean he wants to clarify to be sure he is getting things correct. “*And who is my neighbor.*” This prompts Jesus to launch into the parable.

And this is what makes me think the guy is Lutheran. We have the truth of the Gospel nailed. Salvation is all Jesus gifted us by grace received through faith. It’s not our good works. It’s Jesus. He delivers the goods without question in His Word and Sacraments. We know the answer to “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” is simply, believe in Jesus Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins.

But we also know from Scripture that we live in reaction to this grace lives of love in Christ. And we tend to do exactly the same thing this lawyer does—try to figure out exactly where we are to properly show love so we can do that right...and be done. We want to react rightly, git er done, and be done.

One of my seminary profs said something like, “Lutheran know we need to love, and we look for ways to love, but we often struggle with actually being loving.”

And I think this is one of the points of the parable. The priest and the Levite sought to love and serve God and dutiful carried out their plans in service at the temple and synagogue and such, but the weren’t loving. When a clear opportunity to love was placed in their path, they did not love but instead rationalized some reason to avoid the situation.

The Samaritan was loving. In first-century Israel the wounded man wouldn’t even be considered to be a neighbor of the Samaritan—they’re culturally and religiously at odds with one another. Yet the Samaritan’s nature is to be loving, so he loves...abundantly.

This abundant love has led some to teach that the Samaritan represents Jesus and the wounded man represents sinners. It’s pretty easy to see that allegory, but in the context of the conversation with the lawyer and the question on which it ends, “*Which of these three...proved to be a neighbor?*” and the command, “*You go, and do likewise.*” I think we have to take it further. Jesus is calling on the lawyer—and by extension, us—to be loving.

Boy, that’s a challenge. I’m just not that loving by nature. I’ve got stuff to do in life and I focus on that, assuming everyone else has their stuff handled. I’m not oozing with empathy and

compassion for folks. Perhaps you feel the same. I think women have an advantage too. A woman sees somebody walk into a door and their like, “Oh, are you okay?” and guys just start laughing. But in the end, I don’t think this is really an emotion that Jesus is talking about. I think it’s more of a Law and Gospel thing.

When we live with a mindset according to the law, it’s not at all about love; it’s about obedience. Just read today’s lesson from Leviticus. We read that as rule after rule after rule about what one shall and shall not do, then it finishes up with the tagline “...*but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*” It really seems that such love is laid down in terms of obedience to avoid God’s wrath. And quite frankly, that’s how the Jews and a whole lot of today’s Christians, including Lutherans, think about it.

But if you can get yourself thinking along the lines of the Gospel, what is the starting point? “*For God so loved the world...*” It’s not about obedience at all! It’s about God’s steadfast love being poured out on you in Christ...continually...despite all of your disobedience. God’s unfathomable love acts simply because you are the needy object of that love. It’s grace. It’s mercy. It’s love in effectual action and you are receiving, receiving, receiving it!

Walking in this truth then, gratitude, joy, and thanksgiving is going to bubble up in you and pour out on others around you, perhaps especially when God places another in need in your path. We react not because God requires and commands we act. We do so because we are poor and needy and are continually served by God’s grace to heal us and fill everything we lack. We do so because it would be hypocritically ridiculous for us not to and we do so out of delight and thankfulness.

Unfortunately, this may not be our default mode as Lutherans. We’ve got the theology down correctly and we know darn well that repentance is a big deal when it comes to forgiveness. We know it is by looking into God’s good and holy Law our sins are made plain, drawing us into right contrition and repentance. Too often I think we have a tendency to remain there in our poor-miserable-sinfulness, as if we’re not allowed to move forward into the joy of forgiveness because we just don’t deserve it.

No. Let go of that. Release your guilt as Christ has and live in the joy of the Gospel. This is the key to loving as we should; receiving the abundant love of God as we should! Glorifying in the truth in Christ that we are made holy and living eternally! This is our joy and it is our truth, yes, despite our sin we see before us every day. If you’re constantly seeing and lamenting the sins, you are not getting your face out of the law. Look to Jesus and see the Gospel—the smiling face of God gazing upon you, His redeemed child who He saved not because you deserve it but because you need it. See His face of love in Christ and let that have its way with you.

Jesus says, “*You go, and do likewise.*” You do not want to hear this as a command to obey. JESUS says, “*You go, and do likewise.*” JESUS! The guy who fulfilled the law so that you stand certain your sins are forgiven. JESUS! The guy into whose death and resurrection you stand baptized so the penalty of the Law has no power to condemn you. JESUS! The guy whose body and blood is fed you for the forgiveness of sins, that you are free to abide in His love forever.

Jesus said “Repent!” yes, of course. But get beyond it. Get beyond just the law which brings you there. His proclamation is “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” Living in the Gospel is to receive the fullness of God’s love, and in that, becoming a loving person because of such grace.

Knowing you abide in His love, you can go, and do likewise.

Amen.

