

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
25 August, Anno Domini 2024
St. Luke 10:23-37

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

Children of God,

This parable of our Lord is filled with rich comfort and peace for troubled consciences if we have ears to hear. God grant us ears of faith by the gift of His Holy Spirit so that we may rightly understand and truly believe what our Savior here gives.

All of us have questions for God. How can we not? Everyday we are surrounded by things that we can't understand or make sense of from the small and insignificant to questions of life and death. What does God allow millions of children to be murdered in their mothers' wombs year after year? Why is God allowing the bodies of tortured and confused people to be mutilated under the lie of tolerance and acceptance? Why does God allow wicked and unjust people to falsely accuse and persecute the innocent? Why does God allow many of His children to be hunted down like wild animals by those who hate God and His Word? Why does Satan get to stir up division between Christians? Why does God allow cancer and infections to creep through peoples' bodies and slowly consume them? Why does God allow me to be tempted the way I am? Why is life so hard? But there is only one question whose answer matters eternally - what must I do to inherit eternal life?

The answer isn't mysterious. God gave you the Ten Commandments. Do them and you will live. Don't falter in any point...ever. "Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them." (Deut. 27:26) Love God with all your heart, soul, body, and mind, never even for a moment fearing, loving, or trusting in anything else at all. Pray in perfect faith, entrusting yourself at every turn to God's good and gracious will, whether that means days of joy or days of affliction. Put away from yourself the empty and wasteful adornments of the world and instead clothe yourself in modesty and humility being adorned with love and good works. Treasure the Word of God and the precious Means of Grace above any and everything else in this world. Be at perfect rest and peace even when the whole world is collapsing around you. Then love your neighbor, only ever seeking after and praying for his good in everything, seeking his good over

even your own. Respect those in authority over you and have not a single drop of anger against even your most bitter enemy. Rejoice in and promote your neighbor's success and desire nothing more than what you need for this day. Always uphold the good name and reputation of your neighbor and never have even have a lustful thought which is idolatry. Be content in times of plenty and in times of need. Be perfect. That is what you must do to inherit eternal life. Be like God in your holiness.

That is what you must do. If you are seeking a salvation that you earn, those are the instructions. There are no others - none that are easier to keep. And if you falter, at all, in any way, for even a moment, then you must make satisfaction for your sin. You have to pay the due penalty for your rebellion against the holy God in whose presence nothing unholy can stand and live. "In the day that you eat of it, you will surely die." Death is the price. "The wages of sin is death", eternal death and nothing less. You will remain there until you have paid every last penny of what you owe, which means you will be there eternally.

Your sin kills you. All of it kills you. Every unkind word. Every moment of worry or doubt. Every jealous and covetous thought. Every selfish decision. Every refusal of responsibility. Every failure to pray. Every time earthly things are given priority over the things of God and His righteousness. All of these and every other selfish, idolatrous word or thought or deed kill you, rob you of eternal life, and leave you helpless and dead in the ditch. When you leave the holy Jerusalem of God's Word and head to the accursed city of Jericho, when you stray from the clear Word and command of God, sin and death WILL overcome you, strip you, beat you, and leave you for dead.

This parable isn't about teaching you to be the Samaritan. You already know you should help others. The parable is teaching you that you who are dead in your sins and your trespasses will find no help in the Law, in what you do. The Ten Commandments just keep saying "Do this and you will live". But you haven't. You don't. You can't. All the Law does is show you that you are dead and that you are completely incapable of doing what must be done if you are to inherit eternal life. This is why the priest and Levite both pass by on the other side. They can't help. The Law can't help dead people because the Law requires action on your part, action that you can't take. You can't make yourself a better person. You can't will yourself to love God and your neighbor. That is our wretched condition. Our hearts and our wills are turned against God, wanting what is evil in His sight.

But while the Law can only pass by your corpse, keeping a safe distance while condemning you, there is one who does not turn away or pass by. The Good Samaritan, the Lord Jesus Christ, comes to have compassion on poor, dead sinners. He goes along scouring the ditches looking for them because He can make them alive. He can take your death away. And He does it by laying the burden of your death on Himself. In the Jordan River God the Father anointed Him the sin-bearer of the world, the Christ, the Messiah. Against His perfect innocence was laid the guilt of every last man, woman, and child. None were left out. Not even you. The Lord pitied you as He beheld what sin had done to you, dealing you a mortal wound. And rather than simply let you die as you deserved, He allowed the full wrath and judgement of God to fall against Him. He died your death. He allowed the punches and the spitting and the mockery to fall on Him. He offered no defense and sought no escape so that the nails might be driven through His flesh, the spear be driven through His side, and the blood and water spill out to make full atonement, full payment for you. He entered your tomb so that He could rise from the dead and open your tomb forever. He pours the waters of Holy Baptism upon you to wash away the guilt and the death of your sin, to make His death your death so that His resurrection is your resurrection. These waters have healed you. As St. Peter says, they have saved you. As the Lord Himself promises, all who believe that He has paid for sin and are baptized, will be saved. This is no ordinary washing even though it is ordinary water. It is the very promise of God Himself sealed to you. It is His pledge that all your sins have been laid on Jesus and that by His stripes you have been healed.

And because in this world sin and death remain, because your flesh is still weak, because your enemy the devil still prowls around seeking to attack you again and drag you back into the ditch of death, leading you into all kinds of false belief, despair and other great shame and vice, because He knows well how you suffer under trial and affliction and temptation, because He knows that in this world you have trouble and you are dismayed and overwhelmed, your Savior offers you nourishment and strength to preserve you as you make your way to eternal life. He gives the eternal, resurrection life of His Body and Blood to comfort and sustain you. He brings you to a truly safe space, His Church, where His promises fill your ears and hearts, where He commands His servants to provide for your ongoing care, using the the Means of Grace to keep and sustain and strengthen you until your Lord returns and your time of travail is over.

That is what Jesus has done for you so that you may inherit eternal life. That is the only way that you inherit eternal life. You must receive it as a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ. You must recognize that there is nothing you can do to inherit eternal

life. You must confess that you deserve to be in the ditch and that there is nothing you can do to get out. You need only believe that the Lord Jesus has done what is impossible for sinners to do - He has saved you. He has made you alive. He has washed you clean of all your sins and He provides you all that is needed to bring you safely through this valley of tears and suffering. He is the Good Samaritan. He is your neighbor who has had mercy upon you.

Receive the mercy and ministrations of Jesus which He joyously provides so that you may live. Only do not go back down the road to Jericho. Having been cleansed of your sin turn away from it and set your face toward Jerusalem, God's holy and saving Word and the sacraments which He died to prepare so that your heart may be filled with the joy and certainty of salvation. And as you go up with joy to Jerusalem have compassion on others who are lying in the ditches. Show them the mercy and the love of Jesus so that together you may enter into the joy of Christ.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.