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Pentecost 8

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Mercy? Mercy!”

Text: Luke 10:23-37 (Colossians 1:1-14)

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

You are the man!

Yes, you - the man in the Holy Gospel we just heard.

For you have been assaulted by the devil and his merry band of demon-robbers, and left to die in your sin.

Just as he did to Adam and Eve in the beginning, and to men and women ever since then.

The devil doesn't care who you are, he just wants to use and abuse you.

To satisfy his appetite for human flesh and bone.

To steal and take what is not his.

To assault and murder.

You never see him, though you see his work: the debris of humanity left by the side of the road.

You never see him because he is more clever than to be seen.

Instead, he gets others to do his work for him: namely, you. Me.

Us and our sinful human nature.

And so the assaults come upon men and women *through* men and women.

Through treachery and deceit; through gossip and back-stabbing; through selfishness and pride; through gluttony and lust and greed.

We're killing each other and killing ourselves.

But make no mistake who is behind it all.

The old evil foe, laughing with delight and leaving a trail of death in his wake.

You think it would be different in church, but even here . . .

We are infected and affected too.

Not stopping to help when we should; not wanting to be bothered or interrupted or inconvenienced.

The priest and the Levite who passed by the desperate, dying man were just as desperate and dying as he, weren't they?

They just didn't realize it.

They thought they were living, but they were dying too.

Satan spares no man in his murderous assaults, attacking from without and from within; attacking with truth and with lies - whatever works; attacking with deadly persistence and consistency.

You are the man.
Assaulted and left for dead.

That's why the lawyer's question to Jesus really doesn't make sense.

What shall I do to inherit eternal life?

Man, you're in the ditch! Your life is slipping away!

What exactly do you think you can do?

The lawyer asking *what shall I do to inherit eternal life* is like a man whose body is completely infected by cancer asking: *how can I take care of this hangnail?*

But that's what we do isn't it?

The lawyer, and all the little lawyers inside each of us.

Trying to justify ourselves.

Trying to find loopholes in the law.

What does that word *really* mean? Who is my neighbor . . . *exactly?*

Jesus gives him an answer, though he's not going to like it.

Loopholes closed. No excuses. No rationales.

You go, and do likewise.

And with those words, the lawyer looked around and saw only ditch.

What about you?

But to you, in the ditch, has come a most unexpected helper.

A Samaritan - someone most folks wouldn't even notice, or if they did, wouldn't care about.

Who are those people today?

We see them, but we don't really see them?

We see them, but look down on them?

We see them, and only think: *Thank God I'm not them.*

But *that one* is the one who stopped to help.

He stopped with the very opposite of assault: with compassion.

His thoughts didn't belittle, but cared.

His hands didn't hurt, but healed.

He poured out not wrath, but oil and wine.

And he paid for the man's care.

Had he done this before? He seemed to know the innkeeper and have his trust, that his credit was good.

This Samaritan, who no one wanted as their neighbor, was everyone's neighbor.

Stopping, mercying, healing, caring.

He is a saviour to this man, giving us a picture of *our* Saviour, come for us.

For, in fact, Jesus is the Saviour come for us and all who have been assaulted and left for dead.

He is not only everyone's neighbor - even more, He is the Son of God come to be our brother.

The one who comes in compassion, not to hurt but to heal, to pour out His own blood for our healing, and to pay for our care with His own life on the cross.

A payment of infinite worth for a debt of infinite depth.

That the sin we commit be forgiven.

That the sin committed against us and the death that seeks to devour us be overcome.

That the old evil foe be robbed of his prey, and his laughter and glee be turned to mourning and sadness.

This is our Saviour for us.

Who stops for us not because we ask, but because He has compassion.

Who raises us from death and gives us life again.

Who demanded nothing from the wounded man, because He knew what he would do.

That he would "*go and do likewise.*"

Because those who have been there, know what its like.

You know what its like - to have been assaulted and trampled on and just left there.

To have little or no hope.

To be despairing and hurting.

But having been forgiven, having been raised, having received the washing and the body and blood of your Saviour Jesus, there is something now new in you.

Not the same as before.

A new Spirit, a right Spirit, a compassionate Spirit.

To see ourselves in others, and others in ourselves.

And knows their desperation, for it is our own.

And so stop to help. To do likewise. To do as has been done to us.

Not perfectly, to be sure. We're a long way from that.

But just as the old, evil foe uses us and our sinful nature to do his dirty work for him, even more will our Saviour use our new, risen, forgiven nature to give His compassion to others.

And when we do, it is no longer satan laughing with delight, but the angels in heaven rejoicing over sinners who repent.

And so yes, you are the man - the man no longer dead, but risen and given life!
You are the man to whom Jesus has come with His healing, forgiveness, and life.

You are the man who, as St. Paul said, ***has been qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.***

That's passive.

It's what has been done to you.

It is what God has done *for you*.

So you are the man, now *blessed and just*.

Blessed and just in Jesus, your Saviour.

That you may now live in His mercy, and His mercy now live in you.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.