

10 July 2016  
Pentecost 8

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Like Jesus”

Text: Luke 10:25-37 (Leviticus 18:1-5; 19:9-18; Colossians 1:1-14)

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

**If you put Jesus to the test, you will be the one who ends up failing.** Jesus has a way of turning the tables, and so instead of justifying ourselves (as the lawyer we heard about today tried to do) or getting a pat on the back (which we all want) - when you put Jesus to the test, you are instead shown just how deep our sin runs and how ugly it really is.

That’s what Jesus does today with the this lawyer. A lawyer puts Him to the test. And by lawyer here is meant not a lawyer like we have today, lawyers like the ones sitting in our congregation, experts in civil law, but an expert in the Mosaic Law, in the Old Testament laws, in the laws like we heard from Leviticus earlier. A religious lawyer. And this lawyer was a good one. He answers Jesus’ question perfectly. ***What is written in the Law? 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.***

Very good, Jesus says. ***Do this, and you will live.*** Jesus doesn’t say that by doing this you will earn eternal life. He says: do this, *and you will be living.* Do this, for this is what it means to be living the life God has given you.

Now, we should pause here for a moment and not rush on too fast to the story Jesus tells next. For first of all, *how many of us think this way?* That loving God and loving your neighbor is living? That it is living the life God has given you? Or do we not start with a different view of life, a more *self-centered* view of life? That this is my life, to live how I want, and so think that loving God and loving others is not my life but an *intrusion* into my life? That if I get interrupted, if I have to stop what I’m doing, if I need to go out of my way to help someone - that’s getting in the way of my life and my living of it. That’s not fulfilling my life, but taking something away from it. So right off the bat, we may have a whole different way of looking at life than God does.

But then there’s this too: when I do actually help my neighbor, *am* I loving him as myself? Or even as I do it, am I resenting her for needing my help? Am I bitter toward others for not helping and making me do it? Do I begrudge the expense and the inconvenience? And does that then corrupt my love for God by questioning Him and His ways and His love for me and not wanting the life or the people He has given me? To

love them and to receive love from them. And so then we wind up asking: Why me, Lord? Why so long, Lord? Why this, Lord? Why so much, O Lord?

Now the lawyer probably wasn't thinking of all that at this point, but He did want to live; he did want *eternal* life. *But what's that?* Is it a life that comes after this life? Or is it this life that we have already here and now that will last forever and into eternity? How you answer that is important too.

But for now, the lawyer continues his examination. He knows the Law - *what about life?* How does the Law translate to life, Jesus? ***Who is my neighbor?*** And Jesus tells his famous story.

But I wonder if this is just a story, *or if this hadn't just happened to the lawyer?* If he himself hadn't just passed by someone by the side of the road who had been robbed and needed help? What a thunderbolt that would be if he had! *Who is my neighbor?* You just passed your neighbor, Jesus would be saying! And don't bother trying to go back now. It's too late. Someone else stopped. *A Samaritan.* Yes, someone you as a Jew look down on and consider a half-breed at best, and someone the world would be a better place without at worst. Someone you don't consider your neighbor. Well guess what? He stopped. He helped. And He didn't just do the minimum required, but even more than that. He had compassion. He was, in fact, *filled* with mercy. So you tell me, Mr. Big-shot-lawyer, putting me to the test. You who knows the Law, you tell me: *Who lived the Law? You or the Samaritan?*

**If you put Jesus to the test, you will be the one who ends up failing.** The lawyer, and us.

But now, O Christian, look up and see your Good Samaritan. The One who did not pass by you in your need, but came to you as much more than a neighbor - as a Saviour. And He's the only one who could. For everyone else in this world is in the same situation as we. For we all have been assaulted by sin, assaulted by death, assaulted by satan, thrown into the ditch and not just *left* for dead, but **dead**. Spiritually. Robbed of the life, of the living, our good and gracious God created for us, and created us for. And without a Good Samaritan, that would be our end. Buried in the ditch, one great mass grave for all humanity, eternally dead and eternally dying.

But the One who knows life, created life, is life, and gives life, has come into this ditch of death. And sin, death, and satan did not spare Him, nor did He want to be spared. He had compassion. He was filled with mercy. To do not the least or even the most - but all that was required to give us life again. Which meant taking our sin upon Himself, dying our death, and then rising to life again - that the Law we don't live be lived, and the life we don't have be given. That forgiven and raised and credited with all that He is and all that He has done, we have life again.

So *what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* You've already done it! You laid in the ditch, dead.

*Well that's means I didn't do anything.* Exactly. Life is what Jesus does, and gives. It is what your Good Samaritan did when He stopped for you in the waters of Holy Baptism, washed you clean of all your sins, and raised you to a new life. It is what your Good Samaritan does when He stops here in Holy Absolution, binds your wounds and gives you the oil of gladness in the forgiveness of your sins. It is what your Good Samaritan does as He stops here and feeds you, placing into your mouth His holy Body and pouring over your lips His holy Blood. And He never gives just once, or just a little, but all that you need and as often as you need. A supply that never ends. A Good Samaritan to make you good again, alive again, living again, with the life He created us to have.

So *what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* You already have it! For as St. Paul told the Colossians (and us!) today: ***[He] has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness [i.e., the ditch] and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son [i.e., to life], in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.***

Notice that all the verbs in those verses are all past tense verbs. Jesus has already done it. He has qualified you. You have been delivered. You have been transferred. You have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And as the Catechism tells us, *where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.* Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is living, a life to live now and that will last forever.

Which answers the question I asked earlier but never answered: *Is eternal life a life that just comes after this life? Or is it this life that we have already here and now that will last forever and into eternity?* It is the life, the living, that you've already begun. In Christ. In Your Good Samaritan. A new life, with a new heart. A life not yours, but His, and given to you.

But do you *have to* live this new life? Well, no. I suppose you can crawl back into the ditch - or take a flying leap into it! - and die again. Crawl back under your rock and try to make the best of it. Many do. But do you really want to do that? Can you imagine the man in the story doing that?

So instead, now, the question isn't: ***What must I do to inherit eternal life?*** But rather: *how do I live the eternal life, the out-of-the-ditch life I have been given, I already have, now?* That's quite a different perspective, and so quite a different question, and hearing Jesus answer in quite a different way. ***You go, and do likewise.*** That's how. But not because you have to, but because you can. Because you've been mercied. Because you been enlivened. Because that's living like someone who's been raised from death to life

again. *Like Jesus*.

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.