**Show Mercy**

**Luke 10:23-37**

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

An argument erupted between two best friends. It got louder and louder, the name-calling got uglier, and soon both went their separate ways. It has been about ten years, and they still don’t talk to one another. In fact, if either one sees the other in public, they will go to great lengths to avoid any contact. Friends of both have tried to bring them together, to get them to reconcile, but to no avail. If both are invited to a party, they will stay at opposite sides of the room – that is, if one of them does not altogether. If you talk to them both, neither is really sure what the argument was exactly about, but neither is willing to forgive the other for the words that were said –time continues to roll on. Both claim to be God-fearing Christians. *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

A friend starts complaining to you, "The guy next door is an idiot – always has been. I know him from work and he is just the thickest, takes him forever to get the most simple jobs done. Nobody can work with him and the boss understands why – you cannot stand near the man, his shower must be broke or he’s allergic to water – so he gets solo tasks from the boss. He doesn’t keep his yard clean, there’s always some sort of junk sitting outside cluttering stuff up. Two of the four cars in the yard don’t run. His wife is sick and he needs help, but I’m not going over there to offer my assistance." At the end of the tirade he asks, "See you in church on Sunday? Or will you be in your bow stand?" *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Josie and Herman have been married 37 years, all five children are finally out of the house, the oldest two have given grand-children to the mix. They agreed they don’t have to continue the charade anymore, they are separated and biding their time till the divorce finalizes. It has been ugly! Enemies armed with rifles treat one other better in all out war. The animosity they have toward each other is palpable, and their friends know it, they dread having them in the same place, uncomfortable to have either around. But he faithfully attends the 8:00am service and she will not miss the 10:00 service. *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Visitors show up at church and the whispering starts. Who are they? Where are they from? What church do they belong to? How did they find our church? Can you believe she wore that to church? The only person who talks to them from the time they enter until they leave spoke to them as they walked past on the way to leave, "Just so you know, if you visit again, where you sat is our pew!" *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Did you listen to the exchange between the lawyer and Jesus in our text? It is the lawyer who asks Him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asks him what is written in the law. This teacher of God's Torah, the lawyer, does a good job of summarizing both the 1st and 2nd tables of the law. Jesus responds to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

From the follow-up answer the man gives, we know that he believes he has kept commandments one through three. How do I know that? His next question to Jesus entirely ignores the first table of the law, *“And who is my neighbor?”* It is as if he were asking Jesus, “I love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, but there are neighbors I have issues with, so do I have to love them? Tell me Jesus, exactly which neighbors must I love as myself?”

Does that sound familiar? How many people do we have problems with? Which old friends are we afraid of seeing in public? Which neighbors do we avoid? Who do we pray never calls us again for help and assistance? Whose pain and suffering makes us chuckle? Which idiot do we love to watch make a fool of himself? We are just like the lawyer in the text, desiring to justify ourselves, we ask Jesus, *"And who is my neighbor?"*

Did you listen to the Old Testament lesson? Did you see what the Samaritans did to the people of Judah and Jerusalem? These were technically distant relatives, and did you pay attention to how they treated them, those who were also descendants of Jacob? Jews and Samaritans hated one another from that day onward, and it showed.

In light of that, maybe it helps you better understand Jesus’ response to the lawyer, the story of the Good Samaritan. There was no love lost between these two groups of people, for a Samaritan to help a Jew, or vice versa, was unheard of – it just did not happen.

Jesus is the Good Samaritan. Christ Himself gives of Himself, all that He is and has to heal and care for sinners. He even provides for their further care by providing His church with the means to care for sinners in their convalescence.

How was Jesus treated in His life? Some mocked him, scorning Him, always questioning Him and looking for ways to trip Him up and make Him look bad. Even his own family thought He was crazy for some of the things He was saying and doing.

Jesus talked and spoke of forgiveness and love, but always with the understanding, “Go and sin no more.” It was not by keeping the law that people would save themselves, for Jesus showed time and time again how they failed to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength – and that they certainly didn’t love their neighbor as themselves. Christ's message was always the same, you cannot trust in yourselves.

Ultimately the Jews hated Him so much that they found an excuse to have Him put to death. After the soldiers nailed Him to the cross and the Jewish leaders stood there mocking Him and taunting Him as He hung there to die, what was the first thing He said from the cross? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

The two other malefactors were returning the curses and the taunts of the crowd, but Jesus begged for their forgiveness – asking the Father for mercy, and not to hold their sins against them.

You and I live in disobedience to the will of God. All we need to do is be honest about who are neighbors are – all of them – and it is evident that we do not love them as we love ourselves. In recognition of that fact, it becomes obvious that we do not obey God. We do not love Him with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul, for I we did, we would be obedient to His Word.

But God in His infinite goodness and love has had mercy on us. God’s love for us came down in human flesh to have mercy on us.

Christ found us stripped, beaten, and dying. We are the robbers who have destroyed our own lives with broken relationships by our own fault. Let us be honest and not blame others for our role in every sabotaged relationship. In every broken relationship we were willing saboteurs. It is true! Either we were unwilling to relent, or unwilling to forgive, or simply selfishly wanting our own way.

I could tell you to show mercy. Indeed, in our text, Christ gives exactly those instructions.

But Jesus told the story to show the helplessness of relying upon yourself to obtain the inheritance of eternal life. You can see it clearly, for the harder you try, the more you realize your failures. Christ did this so that you might come to God not in braggadocio, but with meekness. You are to have a repentant and humble heart – and there be blessed by His mercy.

With His own flesh, Christ restores us in a right relationship with God. His forgiveness covers our unwillingness to forgive. With His own flesh, He repairs the chasm that we built between God and ourselves by our own unloving nature. His blood He pours out to be the wine of healing that heals the wounds inflicted by our bloodless conflicts with our neighbors.

Christ is the Good Samaritan who shows mercy to you. He is your good neighbor who is there to refresh and renew you with His healing. In your ears and in your mouths He gives to you the rich bounty of His mercy – the forgiveness of sins. It is in His mercy to you that you inherit eternal life. In the name of Jesus!Amen.