

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity  
St. Luke 10:23-37

Focal Passage: Luke 10:29

“And who is my neighbor?”

The passage selected for the sermon today is from the Gospel according St. Luke chapter 10 verse 29.

“And he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “and who is my neighbor?”

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

We’ve all read the parable of the Good Samaritan. We’ve learned great lessons from it. But who is our neighbor? The lawyer in today’s Gospel wanted to know, so he could justify himself. Why did he need to justify himself? He had already answered the question of how to inherit eternal life. “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.” We hear that every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. It is, after all, the Summary of the Law. And he knew that. But asking who his neighbor was a way to get away with not loving those he despised. Today, let’s look at who our neighbor is through the lens of both the lawyer and the Samaritan, and how the priest and Levite justified themselves for not helping their fellow Jew who was wounded.

I’m no lawyer. I’ve never trained in the law. But I’ve watched the movie “My Cousin Vinny” a couple of times, so my understanding of the practice of the law is probably as good as yours. Some of my former students often told me they wanted to law because they liked money and winning arguments- and they were good at winning arguments. Of course, most of them didn’t like reading much and their comprehension

was not as much as they needed in order to do well in *my* class, so didn't have a lot of confidence in them becoming attorneys. The point being that there so much more than winning an argument. The lawyer in today's Gospel was trying to justify not helping others, though the Law said that he *must*.

You see, he *knew* the law. But as in any court case, the purpose of this interaction with Jesus, was to poke holes in his case. Keep in mind- the law came from who? It came from God, so Jesus was a pretty good authority of the law- both the letter of the law, and the spirit of it also. He also knew how to plug the holes in the arguments that the lawyer was hoping for. He used a parable, a simple story about kindness to someone who was in need.

I had a thought last night, as I was brushing up on my sermon. Do you remember in the Garden of Eden, when Satan approached Eve and told her that she wouldn't *die* from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but that her eyes would be opened. No offense to attorneys, but that was the first cross examination in history. The justification of doing the *opposite* of what God asks of us never leads us in the right way.

In the end, the end, the lawyer had to admit that his justification was not worthy in the eyes of the law and or in the eyes of God.

In Jesus' parable, there were two individuals who justified themselves for not following the law. Let's look at them a little closer. They were on the road to Jericho from Jerusalem, apparently after performing their duties in the temple, which was about 19 miles away.

The road was a rocky valley, and there were plenty of places for thieves and bandits to hide from unsuspecting travelers. In fact, it is still that way today. The priest and Levite may have justified their actions by that fact alone- that it was not safe to stop. Maybe the wounded man was bait for thieves in waiting? What they *couldn't* say is that they didn't *see* him. Jesus pointed out that both saw him and they "passed by on the other side."

Maybe they could justify not stopping because he looked to be beyond recovery. Maybe they thought that others would think that *they* were the one who injured him in the first place. Deuteronomy 22: 1-4 says, “If you see your brother’s ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to its owner. <sup>2</sup> If they do not live near you or if you do not know who owns it, take it home with you and keep it until they come looking for it. Then give it back. <sup>3</sup> Do the same if you find their donkey or cloak or anything else they have lost. Do not ignore it. <sup>4</sup> If you see your brother’s donkey or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it. Help the owner get it to its feet. Exodus 23:4-5 says, “<sup>4</sup> “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. <sup>5</sup> If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it, you shall help him to lift it up.” The priest and the Levite both knew the law. The lawyer knew the law. They knew that doing the right thing in spite of the way things *look* or helping your enemy is being a good neighbor.

The Samaritan had some great justifications for not stopping to help. Samaritans were exiled by the Jews. They were seen as heretics or even as devils. Even Jesus was accused of being a Samaritan and demon-possessed. John 8:48- “the Jews answered him, ‘are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?’”

The Good Samaritan could have passed by on the other side of the road as the priest and Levite did. He set aside his fear of hatred from the Jews. He had compassion for his fellow man. Pope St. Gregory I, also known as Gregory the Great said “he who gives outward things gives something external to himself, but he who imparts compassion and tears gives him something from his very self.”

The Samaritan gave from his very self. He dressed the wounds. He put the wounded Jew on his own donkey and walked to the inn. Not only that, but he gave the innkeeper two denarii- two days wages in those days, to care for the wounded man, with the promise of payment for any other needs.

Which of these proved to be the neighbor? Even the lawyer realized that his question was silly because the law taught him so. Who are neighbors? Not only you, my brethren, but those who hate us. Those who cut us off in traffic. Those who are on the other side of the political spectrum. Those who mock us for our faith in God.

Jesus said, “which of the three, do you think, proved neighbor to the who fell among the robbers?” He might as well say today, did we prove to be like the Samaritan to the person who cut us off, or did we get road rage? Did we say unkind things about the candidate of the other political party instead of praying that they will find God and become his faithful servant? (Even if we don’t think it will ever happen) Did we pray for those who mock our faith, that they will see God?

Brethren, Jesus asks us to be a neighbor to all. He asks us to see the needs of those who are not like us, or even hate us. Which one who showed mercy? Let’s US be the ones who show mercy. Let US go and do likewise to our neighbors.

Amen.