

15 July 2007
Pentecost 7

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Garfield, NJ

Jesus Iuba

“Lord, Have Mercy!”

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

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

Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us. We prayed that in the liturgy again this morning, as we do every week. Because it is what we need. **And it is what God is all about. Mercy.**

But that’s exactly what the lawyer in the Holy Gospel for today didn’t understand about God. And it’s what many people today miss about God as well. *His mercy.* For they think God is all about laws. Do this. Don’t do that. Thou shalt and Thou shalt not. Post the Ten Commandments in every courtroom and schoolroom in America. That will make us a Christian nation, right? Wrong.

That’s the same misunderstanding that caused the lawyer to go up to Jesus that day, with his law question: *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?* For in a “do this / don’t do that” world, he wanted to know what must he do and not do to go to heaven. How much was enough? He wanted to be sure. And he knew the law well! Answering Jesus’ question correctly. *What is the law of God? “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.”* Perfect! (He probably had those passages we heard from Leviticus today memorized as well!) But still he needed to know more. His heart was not at peace. He needed to be sure. **“And who is my neighbor?”**

And Jesus’ response? Well, you know the story. The Good Samaritan. The Priest and the Levite – the lawyer’s buddies, good guys by anyone’s standards, who knew the law at least as well as he did – didn’t stop. Which (you know) maybe (at first) gave the lawyer a glimmer of hope! Maybe some qualification was coming . . . some limitation . . . *Until the Samaritan came along.* This guy who probably didn’t even

know the law! Who wasn't allowed in the Jerusalem Temple. Who was half-a-Jew at best. *He* comes along and – not thinking about the law, not thinking about who the man in the ditch is, not thinking about eternal life, not worrying about the *thou shalt* and the *thou shalt not*s – he stops. **In mercy and compassion.** He doesn't stop to keep the law. He stops to help and serve. And that, Jesus wants the lawyer to know, is what the law is all about. *It is about not thinking about yourself.* Now ***you go, and do likewise***, Jesus says. Quit trying to save yourself.

You see, the lawyer was on the wrong track to start. His question – *What must I do to inherit eternal life?* – was focused on himself, and his own benefit and gain. Because that is what sin has done to all of us. It has curved us in on ourselves. It makes us look at ourselves and worry about ourselves. Sin makes us selfish and self-centered. Even when we try to serve others, how often are we looking for our own benefit as well?

But in the beginning, when God created the world, it wasn't like that. For did you ever notice your eyes? Our eyes weren't made for us to look at ourselves; you have to kind of crane your neck to do that. We were made to look at others. To care for them. And see to their needs. And what a wonderful world this would be if we all did that! If we were all taking care of each other instead of taking advantage of each other. Instead of you taking care of yourself you had a million other people taking care of you! That's the way God created the world. That's His order. That's His way. **Mercy and compassion.**

But what did Satan's words to Adam and Eve do? His words had them take their eyes *off* of God and off of each other, and they looked at themselves. And desired for themselves. And grabbed for themselves. And ate for themselves. No longer serving, but self-serving. And ever since, it has been that way. Every man for himself. And so the lawyer's question: *What must I do to inherit eternal life [for me]?*

And so God gave the Law – not to give us something to do; and not to make us good little boys and girls – but to force our eyes back out to look at others. To make us *stop* looking at ourselves, and worrying about ourselves, and instead look to the needs of others, **in mercy and compassion.**

But you know what? The law can't do it. It can tell us what to do, but it can't make us do it. Oh, it's not that there's anything wrong with the law; it's what's wrong

with us! For as soon as we start looking at others, and serving them, we become like the lawyer and look at ourselves to see how we're measuring up, and . . . ! You see? We're looking at ourselves again! No, the law can't help us. The law can't make us what we need to be.

Because you can't *demand* compassion. You can't *command* mercy. You can't *force* someone to feel for another. Did you ever try? Its like those TV commercials which show starving orphans in Third World countries. If you don't feel compassion, what do those images do? They just make you feel guilty. And that's what the law does. It turns our eyes out, shows us our neighbor's need, *and makes us guilty*. For we haven't done nearly enough, have we?

No, compassion can't be forced. The word itself means something that comes from deep down inside. Down in the gut. That makes us stop and help. With all thoughts of our own benefit a thousand miles away. Here is someone who needs my help. And so I stop and help.

And the only ones who can do that, are those who *already have eternal life*. For only when you don't have to worry about yourself, can you worry about others. Only when you know that all that you need, both in this life and the next, has been taken care of, can you then take care of others. And so the only way you can ***go and do likewise*** is when you realize that that is what Jesus has done for you.

For in this parable, the lawyer and you and me are not the Priest or the Levite or the Good Samaritan - we are the guy in the ditch! The one who has been assaulted by sin, assaulted by death, assaulted by the devil, and left for dead. And we have even inflicted these wounds on ourselves with our own sins, just making our situation worse. **And no one in this world cares.** No one. Because they're all in the same situation as you. Wounded, bleeding, dying, and trying to find life.

Until along comes our Good Samaritan! Our Saviour Jesus Christ. He could not just pass us by. He could not just let us die in our sins. He saw our need, and stopped to help. In **mercy and compassion**. He Who came not to give the law, but to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cleansing to the lepers, and life to the dead. But most of all, forgiveness of sins. For in truth, our Good Samaritan does even more than the Good Samaritan in the parable! For Jesus didn't come along just to fix us up for this life, *but to trade places with us*. To take our place in the ditch, and

give us His home in heaven. And so in mercy and compassion He goes to the cross - with all our sin, with all our guilt, with all our suffering, with all our death. Not for Himself, for He needed nothing. He does it all for us. To give us life. Life from the dead.

And that is the life that has been given to each of you! Who were dead in the ditch of sin. When your Good Samaritan stopped here in the waters of Holy Baptism, washed you clean of all your sins, and raised you to a new life. It is the life that you are given when your Good Samaritan stops here in Holy Absolution, as He binds your wounds and gives you the oil of gladness in the forgiveness of your sins. And it is the life you receive when your Good Samaritan stops here and feeds you, placing into your mouth His holy body and pours upon your lips His holy blood. And never just a little, but all that you need. A supply that never ends. All from your Good Samaritan, who is also your Good Shepherd, who died for you on Good Friday, to make everything good again. *Good*, as it was in the beginning, good. *Good*, as it was before sin, good. *Good*, as God intended it to be.

And so what the law cannot do, Jesus has done. For the law cannot make you good - only guilty. But Jesus makes the guilty good. Giving you a new birth, a new start, a new life, a new heart. In mercy and compassion. And having so received, you can now give the same. Not because you *have* to! But because you *can*! Because as we heard in the Epistle: ***“He has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”*** Did you hear that? He has *already* qualified you! He has *given* this to you! You are forgiven! You have been given the gift of eternal life! And so the question: *“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* is no longer in your vocabulary, because you already have eternal life! And you can't *do* for something you *already have*!

For our Lord *has* had mercy upon us. Our prayers have been answered. And so what do you now do? Rescued, redeemed, forgiven, and free . . . ***you get to go and do likewise!***

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