



Luke 10:30-37

Our Great Heritage 12

Grace-Tucson, AZ

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<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>26</sup> “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

<sup>27</sup> He answered: “‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” <sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on

his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Some of you are no doubt aware of how Martin Luther declared his intention to enter the ministry, to become a monk. But many of us may not know the details, so I’ll give you the short version. In 1505, at the age of 22, Luther received his Master’s Degree from the University in Erfurt, Germany. He would then set out to pursue a degree in law. His parents were proud of their brilliant son—the future lawyer—who would, no doubt, be able to care for them in their old age.

But about six months later, something changed the course of Luther’s life and altered the course of both church and society. As he was walking back to the university from a visit with his family, there was an intense thunderstorm and a bolt of lightning struck so close to him that he was knocked to the ground and cried out, “*Help me, St. Anne! I will become a monk.*” Luther survived and so it was that after only a month of studies to become a lawyer, he followed through on his vow to enter the monastery. What was at first a grave disappointment to his father resulted in amazing spiritual and societal blessings for untold numbers of people, right down to you and me today.

Why do I share this story from Martin Luther’s life with you this morning? For this purpose: so that you and I might consider Christian Vocation, which is a believer’s calling or situation in life. Most importantly, you’ll want to consider *your* Christian vocation, your calling or situation in life.

Luther had previously set out to become a member of one of the most respected professions of the time. His work as a lawyer would help people with their affairs in this world. Though that was more respected than the farmer or the brewer or the shoemaker, it was *not* seen as a higher calling than being a monk. In fact, “vocation” was a word that had been claimed solely by the priests and monks to refer to religious—and especially, monastic work. Life in the monastery gave a person the opportunity to complete his faith through good works and assure him of salvation. If

you wanted to be sure of getting to heaven, life as a priest, a monk, or a nun gave you the very best chance because your days were full of opportunities to do God-pleasing things to earn your salvation. That was the belief of the time and the teaching of the church, so Luther had this same understanding as he entered the Black Cloister as an Augustinian monk.

But as he studied the Scriptures and grew in his faith and understanding, the Holy Spirit led him to see that there were several things wrong with this view of a person's calling in life, in particular the elevated status of the monk's life! His discovery of full and free forgiveness in Jesus, of course, was the most enlightening thing. Not only did a person *not* need to do good works to earn God's love and salvation, he came to realize that this was *impossible*; no one could ever do enough to be saved. And besides, Jesus has done everything to save us—a perfect life, a sacrificial death on the cross, and victory over death. We simply trust in what Jesus has done.

What this also meant was that the priestly life or the monk's life was not the pinnacle and the secluded life inside the monastery walls did not provide anything to them that was not available to every Christian as far as service to God. Every Christian, in whatever their calling or situation in life, could live for God...could please God...could be useful to the people around them. Yes, the ministry was important, but no more so than other situations where Christians functioned in faith and in service to God and other people!

Perhaps nowhere in the Bible is this more clearly shown to us than in our lesson for today, in Jesus' parable of The Good Samaritan. Jesus told this story to a lawyer, but not the kind you're thinking of and not the kind Luther had intended to become. This was an expert in *God's* law. In particular, their emphasis was on the Law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. They studied it, interpreted it and taught it. They were also called Scribes and many of them belonged to the group called the Pharisees as well. So, this was a very religious man who knew the Scriptures well and should have known the will of God.

Jesus pressed him to live a life of love to God, which meant showing love to other people. Jesus in no way was implying that the man could be saved by doing things like loving your neighbor as yourself. He was saying that salvation comes to the person who loves God—and the person who loves God naturally shows love to other people. That is a way that faith expresses itself in everyday life.

Imagine—if you can—a lawyer, a law expert, looking for a loophole! That's what this man did when he responded to Jesus' encouragement with a question, **“And who is my neighbor?”** The Savior knew he was trying to justify his lack of concern for others by excluding some people from the “neighbor” category. It was generally thought that a “neighbor” was a fellow Jew. “Neighbor” was also understood as one who lived very close by—just as we use the word. But Jesus makes the point that your neighbor is any person at all who happens to be nearby and certainly includes those who are in need.

The “hero” of the story is not the person you would expect, which certainly got the attention of the man who heard the story from Jesus’ lips. This story also had something to say to the religious community and people of Luther’s time. And it reveals something important to you and me today about who is called to serve God and others.

You heard the story: a man was beaten up—almost to the point of death—as he walked along the road. You would think that if a priest of God came upon this man, he would immediately help. God’s Old Testament laws contain so many provisions for helping those in need that a priest surely would care for the man. It would be the godly thing to do. But that’s not what happened. He actually moved to the other side of the road to avoid the dying man. The next person who happened by was a Levite—one of those who served in the temple, a church worker. Certainly he would also know that the god-pleasing thing to do would be to help the man. Not so.

This religious man talking to Jesus hears that people just like him did not consider this man worthy of help. The people everyone would expect to serve God by serving others failed to do so.

Then along comes a man from Samaria, the region north of Judea where Jerusalem is located. He was not a Jewish church worker. In fact, his religion was, at best, a mash-up of trust in the one true God and other religious beliefs. He was not a “neighbor” to this beaten up Jewish man in the sense of being a Jew. But Jesus led this expert in the law to realize that this Samaritan acted in a merciful, neighborly way to the injured man. He showed him mercy by bandaging his wounds, transporting him to an inn and paying his room and board while he recovered.

Obviously, this is where we get the term “Good Samaritan” from. The secular world even uses that name to describe a person who helps someone in need. There are Good Samaritan hospitals and organizations. Good Samaritan laws allow for the care of those in need and protect those who provide assistance in emergency situations. Serving others can come from an entirely secular sense of concern or from people who worship something other than the one true God. But a person who *does* know the LORD, ought to know that we serve God as we serve others! That lawyer who confronted Jesus should have known this.

You and I ought to also remember that we serve God as we serve others. This is not only the responsibility of pastors—and they have no higher calling to do so that you do! Christians all show their love to God as they represent their Savior in all they do. Your daily tasks, however routine they may seem to you, are opportunities to serve God. You are fulfilling the role the LORD has called you to. It pleases God when you do this. You are managing the gifts God has given to you—your time and skills. It pleases God when you do this.

You do not need to be a pastor to do this. Nor do you need to fill a church position like a Sunday School teacher or church council member, or be a coordinator of some area of ministry—like a women’s organization, an altar prep team, an ushering crew, an outreach team. Don’t get me wrong, the Lord needs people to do all of these things

too! But God wants us to also understand Christian Vocation—our individual roles of service to God and to others no matter our earthly responsibilities or job or social standing. This teaching is part of *Our Great Heritage* as Lutheran Christians. It is one of the blessings that came out of the Reformation of the Church.

Just think of the many opportunities you have to live out your faith as you go about your day: caring for your children, providing what they need, sharing Jesus with them; assisting a friend—muscle and manpower, a listening ear, a comforting word; your worldly work as an accountant, a landscaper, a doctor, a cashier, a student, a nurse, a policeman, a firefighter, a teacher, an engineer—whatever your job, whatever your daily responsibilities and activities. When you act and behave as a Christian, faithfully using your time and abilities, you please God. When you interact with others, you are the face of God to them! This is what all Christians are and what we do!

What may seem ordinary and routine to you is not ordinary to God! He sees you as his child, going about your assigned tasks. You are reflecting the love Jesus showed to you as you love others enough to give your best as an employee or a student, as a friend, family member...or as a “neighbor” helping another who is in need. The seemingly mundane things of our lives are really not like that in God’s eyes; they are things that bring glory to him and are evidences of thankful love that fills our hearts. The Christian who has this understanding lives the encouragement given by God through the Apostle Paul: **So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)** And this one...**And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)**

**“Whatever we do...for the glory of God...giving thanks to God.”** As we hear that and are reminded of all the everyday opportunities we have to live for God and serve others, we might very well think of our failures. Who of us has perfectly lived our daily routine as a reflection of Jesus’ love for us? Who of us has made the effort to help every person we could? Perfect parenting? Flawless friendships? Spotless service? How many of us have looked at the ministry and considered that to be a higher calling than anything else a Christian can do? That too is wrong. It is a special calling, but God says that it is not for everyone. So what about all of you? The truth is, you are called by God to serve him in your particular situations in life. Perhaps our sin has included minimizing the roles God has entrusted to us.

There’s not one of us who doesn’t need the forgiving love of Jesus, the One who perfectly loved God and showed it in every bit of his life and in his sacrificing service for sinners. The One who told the Good Samaritan story to the lawyer is the One who lived this perfectly and as such provides mercy to us. We are forgiven by Jesus. These sins of ours are gone. Our eternal life secure. Having experienced the love of Jesus in your heart and life, you are equipped and empowered to live your life in service to God and in service to those around you. May God bless you as you live your calling! Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.