

In the ✠ name of Jesus.

Would you rather be called a Pharisee today or a Samaritan? The answer is probably an easy one, although your answer is probably not the same as someone would have answered back in Jesus' day. For us the answer would likely be a confident "Samaritan," with this story of the Good Samaritan in mind. Indeed, no one wants to be called a Pharisee today. That would imply a hypocritical self-righteousness, a snooty attitude of indignation at others' sins while not acknowledging one's own sins. To be called a Good Samaritan today is most definitely a compliment.

In Jesus' day, the answer would likely have been just the opposite. For most people back then, the Pharisee was the person with the good reputation, outwardly righteous. The Pharisee was the person someone might want to imitate. No Samaritan, on the other hand, would be called good. Samaritans were despised among the Jews, and the Samaritans' corrupted religion was rejected.

So, imagine the shock experienced by the nomikos, the lawyer, as Jesus led him to a right understanding of what it means to be a neighbor.

Now the encounter with this lawyer began somewhat adversarial. After all, Jesus had likely just offended this expert on the Law by praying: "*I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will*" (Luke 10:21). He probably said to himself, "Wait a minute. I'm among the 'wise and understanding.' You're saying that the things of salvation have been 'hidden' from me?" And indeed, in what follows he proves Jesus right; he shows himself to be ignorant and lacking in understanding.

Therefore, this expert in the Law decided to put Jesus to the test: "Let's just see." And so he asked Jesus, "*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" Jesus did not fall into his trap. Wisely, He pointed the expert back to his expertise — to the Law. "*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*"

Now, to be sure, the Law of Moses, the Torah, contains rules and regulations. Leviticus, our Old Testament lesson, is part of the Torah, and we heard today many of these precepts of God. Don't "*reap your field right up to its edge*"; don't "*gather the gleanings after your harvest*"; don't "*strip your vineyard bare [or] gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner ...*"; don't "*steal*"; don't "*deal falsely*"; don't "*lie to one another*"; etc. Etc. And then summarized positively: "*you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*"

But the Torah contains something much more important than statutes. It contains the promises of God that point us to our salvation, the promises of a Savior, the offspring of woman, of a Son of promise through whom all nations would be blessed, of a king, the Christ, from whom the scepter would never depart, of a prophet to whom all should listen.

Jesus surely wanted this expert in the Law to be led to this Gospel for the hope of his inheritance, as we hear from St. Paul: it's "*the Father, who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*" It's the Father who has done it, who "*has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" The lawyer was led like a horse to water, but he would not drink. Instead, he recited the Law in terms of its statutes.

*"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."*

Now this is indeed the law, and it is good. You will recognize these two general laws as what Jesus calls "*the great and first commandment*" and "*the second [which] is like it*" (Matt. 22:37-39). And if you remember your catechism work, you'll remember that these two summarize all of the law; the first one summarizes the First Table of the Law concerning our relationship with God, and the second summarizes the Second Table of the Law concerning our relationship with our neighbor.

But don't misunderstand the Scriptures. We need always to remember that our love is a response to God's love toward us in Christ Jesus, as St. John instructs us, "*We love because he first loved us*" (1 John 4: 19). And St. Paul, having quoted this summary command from Leviticus, also confesses, "*love is the fulfilling of the law*" (Rom. 13:10).

This love is not optional, not that we're justified by our love, but our love is an expression of our faith. It flows out of our faith in Christ, God's own expression of love toward us. St. John says, "*If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother*" (1 John 4:20-21).

With all this in mind, it's perhaps surprising to us, that Jesus commends the expert: "*You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.*" But here again, I

think, Jesus wants this expert to recognize his complete inability to do what God commands as God requires. That is, that he can neither love God nor love neighbor without fail. Remember, the Lord commanded through Moses, “*You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy*” (Lev. 19:2).

But the lawyer still didn’t get it. He was still thinking about salvation in terms of what he must do to be accounted righteous, not what God has done. He wanted “*to justify himself.*” That’s the way with most religions. Man is justified by what he does, not by what God has done. Christianity teaches uniquely the contrary, and so shows itself to be the one true religion, the one true way to the Father—through faith in Jesus Christ.

Note, just before this lawyer had arisen to challenge Him, Jesus had taught “*All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*” (Luke 10:22). Salvation is not by works of the law, but through Christ, by the work of Christ, by His all-availing sacrifice on the cross, by His revelation of the Father received by faith. Christianity is not a religion of the law, but of grace. “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*” (Eph. 2:8-9).

None of us has reason to boast, not little innocent Naomi born days ago, but born in sin and with death’s curse awaiting her. She has received God’s grace today in the waters of holy baptism, been given new life in Christ Jesus, that living and believing in Him, she might never die. None of us has reason to boast, not you reminded today that you are unable to merit salvation by your striving. But you are receiving grace today and more grace as you hear God’s word of grace read and preached and as you soon will eat it in the Supper of His Son, and you will come away forgiven, restored, strengthened.

For what? To love God and love neighbor. That’s how we pray after the Holy Communion: “we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another” (LSB, DS Setting 3). And just who is your neighbor? Jesus’ illustrates the answer in the story of the Good Samaritan where instructs us whom WE are to be a neighbor to. We’re to be a neighbor to the persons we encounter who are in need. The priest, a man in service of God, did not act like a neighbor to the man waylaid, robbed, beaten, and left for dead. “You, O priest, say you love God? Liar!” The Levite didn’t either, though he too was by all appearances religious. No, the one who was a neighbor to the man in need was the Samaritan, “*the one who showed him mercy,*” the one “*bearing fruit in every good work.*”

You know the story. It's called the parable of the Good Samaritan, but it doesn't really seem to be a parable. Some make it an allegory — I've done that myself in the past — making Jesus to be the authentic Good Samaritan. It's attractive as a way to find some Gospel in what seems to be mostly law. But even though we might allegorize it, I don't think Jesus was telling an allegory whose meaning was hidden from the mind of the lawyer in our text.

No, I think Jesus was pointing this expert in the Law back to the Law, but wanting him to see the promises contained in Torah of Moses, which is also a main reason we as Christians continue to read the Law. Certainly, it's not so that we might follow the Lord's command not to reap to the edge of the field. Rather, as Luther taught, it's because of "the best thing": "the promises and pledges of God about Christ," even to the Gentiles. "I read Moses," Luther wrote, "because such excellent and comforting promises are there recorded, by which I can find strength for my weak faith. For things take place in the kingdom of Christ just as I read in Moses that they will; therein I find also my sure foundation" (Luther, AE 35, 168-9). That's how Jesus also taught: "*if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me*" (John 5:46).

Thus, Jesus holds up this example of a Gentile Samaritan as one who out of a righteousness of faith, expresses his faith in the good deeds prepared for him to do. What Jesus, thus, says to the lawyer, He says also to us who believe in Christ: "*You go, and do likewise.*" God grant us His Holy Spirit, that we who live in Christ might also live in love.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.