

St. Peter Lutheran Church  
July 13, 2025  
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany  
Luke 10:25-37

**And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested [Jesus], saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”** As a certain professor of mine would say, “Wrong question.” Only God has life in himself, and he gives life to his creatures. We receive life from God—we do nothing to obtain it. Just as we can do nothing to obtain this earthly life—we have no ability to bring about our conception and birth—so eternal life is God’s gift as well. All life is God’s gift.

But the lawyer asks the wrong question—he wants to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. His choice of words betrays his deep misunderstanding. He asks what he must do, but then he refers to eternal life as an inheritance. An inheritance is not something earned or merited, but a gift given based on relationship. A son receives an inheritance from his father simply because he is his father’s son—it is an unmerited gift. So it is with eternal life.

The Lord Jesus points the lawyer to the Law of God, the lawyer’s expertise, and says to him, **“What is written in the law? How do you read it?”** And the lawyer gives a perfect answer. In fact, he gives the same answer Jesus himself gave when asked by a lawyer which is the first commandment of all. He cites from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, saying, **“‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”** Right he is—**on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.** So Jesus said to him, **“You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”**

Do this and you will live—love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Have you done this? Do you fear, love, and trust in God above *all* things, at *all* times? Do you use the name of the Lord your God only to bring Him glory, calling upon it in every trouble, praying, praising, and giving thanks? Or do you misuse his holy name, cursing, swearing, lying and deceiving with it? Do you hold God’s word sacred and gladly hear and learn it? Is the only thing that prevents you from being here for Divine Service severe illness or emergency? Or do you disregard or even despise God’s holy Word, putting many things before it?

And that’s just love toward God. How about loving your neighbor as yourself? Do you honor your father and your mother and all authorities as God’s representatives, serving and obeying them, loving and cherishing them? Do you help and support your neighbor in every physical need? Do you lead a sexually pure life? Do you only desire the spouse God gave you? If you are single, are you content? Or do you commit fornication and adultery, whether physically or in your heart? And what are your feeding your eyes? Are your thoughts pure? Jesus said, **“whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** Do you steal? Do you take off five minutes early from work, thieving your boss continually? How

do you speak about others? Do you explain everything in the kindest way, doing your very best to protect your neighbor's reputation? Are you content with what God has given to you or are you sick in bed like King Ahab when you can't get Naboth's vineyard for yourself?

Do this and you will live—love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Do this and you will live. None of us have done what is required. By our works, we have earned not life, but death. We are altogether unclean—even when refraining our mouths and hands toward evil, out of our hearts continue to spill all manner of wickedness. Who will save us from these bodies of death? Based on the Law, it is clear that we are unable to justify ourselves. By works of the Law, none will be saved.

And yet, the poor lawyer in the Gospel asks this absurd question—**“And who is my neighbor?”** This he asked, wanting to justify himself. We are blind leaders of the blind apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit. We cannot even recognize our sin rightly apart from the Spirit. But the Spirit is the Lord and giver of life—even to wicked sinners, even to us. So the Spirit must convict us of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. We must be crushed by the Law, exposed as the wicked sinners we are. Otherwise, we keep trying futilely to justify ourselves. And the Spirit must teach us where we are to be found righteous—only in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the entirety of the Law's demands—He loved God above all and his neighbor as himself. In Christ, **Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.** God is just—we have sinned against him and a reckoning for that sin is required. So by God's mercy, Jesus was crushed for our iniquities, pierced for our transgressions, for the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. By the awful judgment of Jesus' cross, we have peace with God. **Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends**—Jesus loved his neighbor as himself.

So Jesus tells the poor lawyer about this love of God. He tells the lawyer how he was sent into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He tells the lawyer these truths in the story of the Good Samaritan. He speaks of a man with no ability to lift himself up, no hope of life. He speaks of a man whose sentence has become death as he lies beaten at the side of the road. And in this story, we see God's heart—where though we have brought this situation upon ourselves by our sins, God is moved with compassion for us, seeing us as helpless, even as victims. This is how God finds us, we who are conceived and born in sin, battered daily by the devil, and confounded by the evil world. We lie dying in our sins, with no ability to save ourselves.

And other sinners cannot save us either. The priest didn't save the dying man, and neither did the Levite. For if they took this man's death upon themselves, they would become unclean. They were unable to take his burden as their own, for it would be to their own detriment.

But then comes the unlikely hero—not the priest or the Levite—who are natural kin and friend of the dying man, but the Samaritan—who is the enemy of the dying man. God sends us a Savior while we are enemies with Him. God sends His Son into the world, into our flesh, so that He can

not avoid our uncleanness as we lie dying in our sins, but so that he can reach down and touch us, even as we are bound in sin and death. He comes to us in that state, bandages our wounds, pours on oil and wine, sets us on his own animal, takes us to an inn, and takes care of us.

Jesus rescues us. He takes our burdens as his own. He doesn't avoid our uncleanness, our sin, our death. He takes it. He endures it. And he lays down His life for us. Then he places us in the inn of the Church—not by the balm of oil and wine, but through the washing of regeneration of Holy Baptism. And in this Christian Church he daily and richly forgives our sins and the sins of all believers. He gives us innkeepers to preach His Word to us and give His Holy Sacraments—to give to us the medicine of immortality, which we will eat and drink tonight. So we are cared for, even after He has gone away. We are cared for until He comes again.

So we do nothing to inherit eternal life, and yet we inherit it all the same. By the work of another, our Good Samaritan, the Lord Jesus Christ. He provides all that is necessary for our salvation, he pays for our redemption by His own blood. He cares for us, preserves us, guards and protects us from all evil, and brings us safely to Himself in heaven.

When Jesus is done telling the story, he asked the lawyer, **“So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And [the lawyer] said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”**

Jesus has taken care of you fully. In Him, your sins are forgiven, and you will inherit eternal life. Boy does this free you up to love your neighbor. Instead of worrying about what you must do for yourself, you can think of what you can do for others. God doesn't need your works, but your neighbor does. The world is full of people lying by the side of the road dying, both figuratively and literally. And you have Jesus, the Savior, to bring to them. You have experienced His compassion that enables your compassion toward others—others who remind us of ourselves—for such were we before Christ rescued us. So be merciful even as your Father is merciful. If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.