**Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity**

**Luke 10:23-38**

***Go and Do Likewise?***

We like a good loophole. Every year at tax season people clamor for their accountants hoping to find some sort of loophole to reduce their tax bill. Students try to find a loophole to make their assignments easier. Those who want to lose weight search for a loophole to get around diet and exercise and disciplining themselves. Today Jesus tells us about a certain lawyer in search of a loophole either to work his way into heaven or to put a limit on the list of people Jesus told him he must go and help as the Samaritan helped the man left for dead on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. And even we, when we hear Jesus’ command “Go, and do likewise” start to scour the pages and in a panic search high and low for a loophole. Everyone loves the Good Samaritan until that irritating imperative which we rephrase as a question: Go and do likewise?

The problem with the lawyer, the student, the dieter, the taxpayer, and everyone else is we know that there is no loophole, there is no getting out of the hard work, there is no justifying ourselves. The lawyer Jesus encounters isn’t a lawyer we think of, going into the courtroom as the prosecution or the defense. This lawyer is a church lawyer. He is one who knew the Laws of the Old Testament backward and forward. He was a master of Holy Scripture. So, he knew what Scripture said and what it meant. He knew that those words from Deuteronomy, “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,” were as black and white as they appeared. There is no loophole, no workaround. He knew they condemned him. He was guilty as charged because he did neither command perfectly.

But the guilty never go down without a fight. No one in today’s judicial system accepts their guilty verdict without an appeal. They grope for one loophole, one technicality, one undotted I that can get them off the hook, or at least a reduced sentence. The lawyer squabbling with Jesus does the same. He asks Jesus to define “neighbor,” thinking that definition can somehow be reduced to ethnicity, ideology, religious affiliation or something like that.

This Parable of the Good Samaritan is often used to tell us that everyone is our neighbor. We should not limit those whom we would help as the Samaritan helped the poor victim he came across. But there are two problems here:

One – It’s true. Everyone is our neighbor. That makes “go and do likewise” a law, which it is. And as with all of God’s holy Law, it is unattainable. Only God Himself can keep it, which He did in Jesus Christ when He died to forgive the sins of all people of all time. But ,

Second – If we simply make the Good Samaritan Parable a way of saying *everyone* must be helped by me, then we are the lawyer—we have found a loophole, we have justified ourselves. How? Because if God stands before us on Judgment Day and asks, “Did you show selfless love to everyone?” We get to smile at Him and say, “Well, of course not! How could I? It’s an impossible task! I’m acquitted!” Which is entirely true. You cannot hear this parable and then go out and fix the homeless problem in Grand Rapids. You do not have enough money, land, or other resources to build each person a house, enough money to pay their utility bills, enough connections to get them all jobs and education to keep them from repeating the situation that launched them into homelessness in the first place. Jesus is not telling you to go out and fix Ukraine, poverty in Haiti or end world hunger. That is in no way the point of today’s Gospel.

How do I know? By saying that aren’t I just giving you the excuse to go out unchanged, living selfishly and helping no one? No. Words are not neutral. Words mean something. The word translated as “neighbor is,” **πλησίον** “which is the Greek word for “someone brought near.” This word has to do with physical proximity. Jesus is telling you to act as the Good Samaritan to those He brings near to you. This parable is not about a nebulous group of generic “people” and saying “I *can’t* do this; it’s about retrospectively looking at your life and saying I *haven’t* done this. God has brought someone near to me, someone whose name and situation I knew, and I did nothing to help them. At most I said, “I’ll pray for you” and didn’t even follow through with that. I have not gone and done likewise. That Law has no loophole. That Law makes us uncomfortable as it moves in closer, as it beats us, robs us of life, and leaves us for dead.

But Jesus has come to give you His boundless love. He has seen you lost and condemned condition. He has seen the filth of you sin and He has picked you up, becoming a beast of burden as He carried your lifeless soul. He has bandaged you, He has poured on the anointing oil of Holy Baptism and the Wine of Holy Communion. He has left you in the care of His Holy Church and has promised to come back for you to take you home with Him. He has died in your place and has risen from that death to guarantee you new life.

Now that you have been risen with Christ and are no longer a slave of sin, He has given you a new man who delights in doing good, who makes use of the increase of faith, hope, and charity caused brought by the Holy Spirit. So, when you hear that word of Jesus, “Go, and do likewise,” you delight in doing so, in thanksgiving that God, in Jesus Christ, has already done likewise for you, and continues to do so. You won’t be perfect at showing compassion to those God places into your life as an opportunity for doing good, but when you are not ad the Law does its killing, accusing work, Jesus, you Good Samaritan will heal you by forgiving you. He continually binds your wounds with the Holy Absolution, with the fact that you ARE Baptized. And He binds you up today with the Holy Supper of Christ’s true body and true blood. These are the divine medicines that heal eternally. There is nothing more for you to do. Your Redeemer and Savior places you in the Church, where the inn-keeper can take care of you until Jesus returns. You are here with all your fellow travelers for care and for support. The Lord’s mercy is for all people. And if for ALL, then it is for you, too.