

Sermon: 8th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 10:25-37 (v.28)

Theme: Faith and love

Goal: To love God shows itself when we love our neighbor.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Have you ever faced a situation similar to the story told by Jesus in our text? Someone lying on the roadside – and, what to do? Shall we help? Shall we not help? I have faced this situation twice:

I was driving my car near the office of the Lutheran Hour in São Paulo, where I used to work, when I saw a lady walking on the sidewalk and she collapsed. I parked my car and ran to help her. She was having an epilepsy seizure. I waited for a while, because I didn't know what to do, till she began to recover. She didn't stay far from that place and I helped her to go to her house. I rang the bell and explained to the person who came to the gate what had happened.

Another time I was travelling with my family and with a lady of our congregation for a week holiday in her farm house. When we left the main road, we saw a man lying on the roadside. The lady said: *Stop, pastor, let's help*. But I didn't stop. I said: This can be an ambush and other people are in the bush waiting to assault us... And this caused me a lot of compunctions in the next days...

Did the first case give me a special "cushion" in heaven? Or did the second case throw me in the hell?

There are difficult decisions to take when we face the needs of other people, not just this kind of needs, but emotional and other needs as well. What shall I do? Whom shall I help? Who is my neighbor?

I – Who is my neighbor?

This is the question the expert in the Law raised to Jesus when the Ten Commandments were summarized in two sentences: Love the Lord your God, and: Love your neighbor as yourself.

To love God does not seem that difficult. He is in heaven and if I do my duties coming to church sometimes it's fine... Is it so?

To love our neighbor seems to be a little more difficult. Who is our neighbor? Whom shall I help? What shall I do?

The expert in the Law knew the answer. From the 4th to the 10th Commandment God is very specific in what we shall do or what we shall not do to our neighbor: Honor your father and your mother, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor, you shall not covet. But his question showed his selfishness and how far his heart was from the true love to God. – We come back here to one of my last sermons, when we talked about *our greatest enemy: our own heart, which does not delight in God and the blessing of neighbor, but which greedily always seeks to put self into the center of every picture* (Phil Brandt, p. 8).

The story Jesus told him put the expert in the Law (and each of us) in an even more difficult situation:

Two well-known church leaders, a priest and a Levite, didn't help the man lying on the roadside. The priest and the Levite – we would say today: The pastor and one of the Elders – knew very well the commandments and what to do in such a situation. But they didn't help the man. A foreigner, a Samaritan, hated by the Jews, yes, he helped.

Who is the Samaritan for you? What kind of people or race do you hate? If you were lying on the side road, would you accept help from one of your enemies?

The expert in the Law had to acknowledge that the only one who really showed love to his neighbor lying on the road side was the Samaritan, because “he had mercy on him”. And Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Mercy: this is a key word in this story. It is not just a matter of obeying the Law, but to have mercy. And when we have mercy, nothing is difficult to do to our neighbor. Mercy comes from the heart of God to our heart. Mercy is a fruit of the true faith. Mercy will determine our decisions, when and whom we shall help. Of course we cannot stop at every robot and help those people who are asking for some money there. But maybe we can help some of them. Or there are other manners to help needy people, such as offering our shoulder to someone who is crying or visiting an elderly, helping in a special campaign as we are doing for Hunter, giving some clothes for someone who suffers in this cold and wet winter... It's a matter of mercy, not just a matter of duty. I cannot love out of duty.

II -Do this and you will live

It is interesting to note in this text the answer Jesus gave to the expert in the Law: “Do this and you will live.” As Lutherans, we always speak and preach about salvation by grace and by faith alone, not by what we do: If you believe in Christ, you are saved. Right! But what does it mean to believe in Christ? Is this just an intellectual and private exercise that I believe and this is enough? What does it mean “to believe”? Of course, we trust in Christ and in His atonement on the cross for our sins; we believe that our sins are forgiven when we confess them and believe that Jesus paid for

them on the cross; we believe that we receive God's grace and forgiveness at the Holy Baptism and at the Holy Communion. But we cannot restrict this faith in a selfish way for ourselves only. This faith is a light to the world and shows itself in acts of love: Love for God and love for the neighbor. Therefore, Jesus could say: "Do this and you will live".

The Apostle John wrote: "We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:19-21) ... This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:16-18).

Conclusion: We are not called upon to great or heroic deeds, like the conquering of some primal evil, or the slaying of some mythical dragon; but we are called to the real and hard work of living in a community which genuinely cares for one another. In this sort of community, the hungry are fed and you have an eye out for the weak, the blind, and the deaf. Your words are spoken gently but truly. You cannot bear the grudge, but must speak reasonably with the brother. This is not a normal or easy thing. It is a creation of God, a beautiful thing...The man's eternal life does not hang on his obedience to some commandment, but on the love of God, the very love by which God possesses him and enables him both to love God and every human being. This parable proclaims our incapacity, and the capacity of God. (Phil Brandt, pp. 14,54). Amen. Pr. CWWinterle, Cape Town, 10.07.2016