

**August 29, 2010**  
**Trinity 13**  
**Luke 10:23-37**  
**“The Law which Kills”**

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lawyer wants to know how to keep the Law in order to inherit eternal life. But that is impossible. The Law doesn't save. It kills. There is no nice way to preach it. You don't take the edge off of: **“You are going to Hell”** by saying it nicely or by smiling. You only give the impression that either you don't care or it is a joke. There is another option. Don't preach the Law. Don't say, **“You are going to Hell.”** Instead hold out the Law like a promise. Pretend that the Law is obtainable. Men love that. It still won't save, but it will gain you friends. It allows men their delusions for a time, until the wolf sheds his false, sheep's coat and devours them. Despite the fact that it seems right to men and sells a lot of books, the Law cannot save. If there had been a law given which have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the Law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin!

Besides this the lawyer cannot do anything to inherit eternal life. It does not matter how hard he tries, how good he is, or how much he wants it. Inheritance is not earned. *Even if the lawyer did keep the law perfectly, so what?* God wouldn't owe him anything. They'd just be even. It is not like you go to the police station to get a reward for obeying the speed limit and not stealing from your neighbors. That is what you are supposed to do. *What must you do to inherit anything? What must you do, for instance, to inherit the crown to England?* That sounds good. I'd like to be the Prince of the Wales. Too bad. You can't be. You must be born of the right father and mother. There is no other way. You cannot earn it. You cannot buy it. You cannot steal it. Inheritance is a birthright, an accident of genetics. It has nothing to do with your skills, abilities, personality, charm, or desire. You can make all the decisions you want about who you want to be but none of them will make you the Queen of England. Heaven is inherited in the

same way. To inherit eternal life you must be born from above by water and Spirit. You must call God Father and Brother. You must be emptied of yourself and filled with Him, adopted by Grace that you did not earn but which He bestows from His mercy. Righteousness comes through the promise by faith in Jesus Christ. It is given to those who believe.

Which brings us to the parable. The lawyer asks, ***“Who is my neighbor?”*** And the answer, of course, is: ***“Everyone.”*** That is what the Law expects. That is what the world wants. All the world loves this parable. For they think Jesus is telling us to be nice to one another. This parable is just like Aesop’s fables. It is a call to good works, a religion of effort, morality, and motivation. But if that is what Jesus means with this parable, if He is simply cutting the Lawyer off from his loophole, saying everyone is his neighbor and he must love them everyone perfectly, then He leaves the Lawyer damned! For the Law does not save. The Lawyer is looking for a loophole because of his frustration with the Law, because he knows that he has not kept it. If the world’s interpretation of this parable is right it is the equivalent of Jesus telling the Lawyer to go to Hell. For no matter how good the Lawyer is, no matter how many people he helps, he will never be good enough. He cannot justify himself.

But notice that Jesus turns the lawyer’s question around. The Lawyer asked, ***“Who is my neighbor?”*** That is, ***“Who must I love?”*** Jesus asks, ***“Who was a neighbor to the man in need?”*** ***That is, “Who loved?”*** Jesus places the lawyer in the ditch. It is not a call to do good. It is a call to receive mercy. The Lawyer is in the ditch of the Law. He is dead on the side of the road, whether he knows it or not. The Law goes marching by. The helpless priest and Levite skitter past not because they do not care, but because they cannot help. They can only kill. The Lawyer must find a Neighbor who can lift him out of death, a Neighbor who is merciful, who will bind up his wounds, pour on wine and oil, walk beside him as a servant while he rides, take him to an inn of recovery, pay for everything, and promise to come back. That Neighbor is an outsider, an ethnic enemy, despised, scorned, betrayed, and killed. He has no obligation to help. He is moved by

compassion. That Neighbor can make the Lawyer a son with the inheritance of heaven.

The answer then to “**who is my neighbor?**” is it not “**everyone.**” It is Jesus. Jesus is my Neighbor - not for me to serve, for me to love, for me to do good things to, but for me to be served by, to be loved, to receive good. Jesus, the Merciful One, is my Neighbor. He loves me as Himself. He keeps the Law for me. Here is eternal life: not in a call to do good works, to be the Samaritan, but rather in receiving the ministrations of the Samaritan, our just defender. Jesus finds us broken by the Law, helpless in the ditch, dying. We wound up there because we hated Him. But still He loves us. He intervenes. He provides. *Oil for Baptism? Wine for Holy Communion? The Inn for the Church?* Of course. This is, after all, a parable.

Now, I don't why you came here this morning. We all have bad reasons. Mine are the worst of all: I'm paid to be here! We like to try and justify ourselves. Maybe you come to Church because you feel guilty and hope your attendance will please God. Or maybe you are just lonely and don't have anything else to do. You come out of habit or because you have friends here and want to see them. I don't know, and I don't care. Here is the significant thing: You are here and Jesus is here. He is not here to judge you. He is here to heal you, to restore and refresh you, to love and forgive you, to be your Neighbor and your Brother. It is not that your sins are not significant or that He is enabling you, winking at your sins or looking the other way. Your sins are destructive and shameful, but He forgives them from His mercy. God is love. He loves to love you.

In that mercy you have the power to resist and overcome. You do not have to live in drunkenness and lust, in lewdness, anger, and covetousness. You do not have to keep making the same mistakes. He has provided a better a way, a good way, the only way. It is the way of the cross, the mortification of the flesh in daily drowning and dying, in emptying and brokenness, in dependence upon Him and His mercy. In His death and resurrection all things are new, all things are clean and pure. But

most significantly, in His death and resurrection, you are His and you are perfect. Submit to that. Give up. Die to self. Live to Christ. Rest in grace. Wait in hope.

Whatever reason you may have thought you had for coming this morning, or even if you came without any reason at all, the real reason in the end is that God led you here. Your presence is of cosmic significance. The angels see you and they rejoice. God has not forgotten the promise He made to you when you were Baptized. He claimed you. He put His Name on you. No one steals from Him. This is where He wants you because this is where He is present according to His mercy and grace. He has a surprise for you, for the lawyer in you. You do not have to keep the Law. You do not have to be good. You do not even have to understand. He gives Himself to you. He will lead you. This place is but an inn of rest and recovery. It is temporary, a shadow of the real thing to come. Jesus has paid for everything and He is coming back. He will take you home.

In the meantime, in this crumbling shack of grace, eat what He gives: His Body. Drink what He sheds: His Blood. In It there is strength to wait and there is strength to believe. In It there is a promise and a foretaste. Soon, dear believer, soon, your Lord will return. In + Jesus' Name. Amen.