

Trinity XIII, 2006
Text: Luke 10:23-37
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

Many a teacher has said, “There are no stupid questions.” Perhaps that's true, but there are at the very least nonsensical questions: questions that just don't work with reality. The lawyer in today's text asks Jesus one of these nonsense questions: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

What must I do to inherit? That's nonsense. What must you do to inherit the crown of England? What must you do to inherit the Van der Bilt mansion? What must you do to inherit controlling stock in Microsoft? You can do nothing to inherit these things. To inherit something you must be born into it, it's not what you do that earns it for you, it is a gift from the father and mother who gave you life. And if your mother is not the Queen or your father Bill Gates, you won't be getting the crown, the mansions, or the stock. You can do nothing to change that.

So repent. You cannot scale the heights of heaven with your claims of godliness: for it isn't good enough. It is, after all, Jesus who said, “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Are you perfect? Do you always show mercy? Do you never lust? Never lie? Do you never call people names? Then by nature God is not your Father – rather, as Jesus in another place notes you have the devil as your father: for he is the father of lies and liars.

Don't be too proud to admit it: by your actions and thoughts and words you have shown yourself all too often to be by nature a fallen child of the Father of Lies. In this parable Jesus that tells, you are not the rescuing Samaritan – you are the man in the ditch. You were going down from Jerusalem to Jericho – that is, you were going down and away from the Holy City, away from the Temple, away from God's presence to a city which God destroyed and set a curse upon, that anyone who would seek to rebuild it would be cursed and cutoff. On your way, that

liar and murderer of old the devil came and reneged on all the false promises he made to you about sin: it won't really make you happy, it only leaves you half-dead in a ditch, unable to pull yourself up by your bootstraps.

In your sorry state who could help you? Not the priest and the Levite: for all they have to offer is the Law. The Law of God is good and wise: if you keep it perfectly you will live as Jesus says. But what a horrid sentence of condemnation that is to all mankind! Do this and live: but I don't do this! Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect: but I'm not perfect and thus have no Father in heaven! And so the priest and the Levite just pass you by, the Law may be good, but it cannot save the man lying in the ditch, beaten by the enemies he thought were his friends who struck him as he fled from God. The good works the Law commands cannot save you.

But enter into our story another Man. He comes as an outsider, an outcast – the priest and the Levite would surely reject him, the half-breed Samaritan. For He came to His own, but His own knew him not. But this Samaritan, which name means Defender, he comes to have mercy, love for the sake of love, because he is Love. He comes to you in the ditch and binds up your wounds. And behold how He heals them: He pours on oil and wine. This is an odd prescription – but remember, this is a parable, an allegory, a story like the tales that Aesop told that you loved when you were a child. Learn to be a child again, for does not our Lord say that to enter the kingdom of heaven you must receive it like a child, yes, learn to be a child again and see the meaning behind these story words. The oil is the anointing of baptism washing away your uncleanness of sin. The wine is the wine of heaven, the very Blood of Christ poured down your throat and giving new life, for it is the Life Blood of Christ.

And then this Samaritan, this Defender, this one who pours out his blood on you, picks you up and takes you to the Inn where there is always room, the boarding house for sinners, the hospice for those who only recover by dying and rising again from the dead: he brings you to the Church and bids the keeper of the Inn, the steward of the mysteries, to give you what you need and nothing will be lacking.

And so did Christ once answer a nonsensical young know-it-all and turn his world upside down. The question to be asked was not: Who is my neighbor? Everybody knows the answer to that question: everyone is your neighbor. The question to be answered is: What neighbor can save me since I have fallen in this ditch? Who will be a neighbor to me? Who will rescue me from this body of

death?

Praise be to God: Jesus will. He became your neighbor when no one else could help. He took up your human flesh and walked that deadly road where the devil prowled. He offered to trade his life for yours. He himself volunteered to go down from Jerusalem to Jericho, to go outside the walls, to be cursed for your sake – for everyone who dies on a tree is cursed, as St. Paul said. And thus did Jesus fulfill his neighborly love for you: he died for you on that cross.

But even death cannot keep this Samaritan down: for he is the Defender, the Anointed, the Christ. So up he rises on that third day alive forever and giving life. He has indeed given you new birth in baptism. New birth! Just what you needed. For with every birth there is a father and a mother: and with this new birth through baptism in the Inn, Mother Church, you also now have a new Father: the true Father, God in heaven. And with every new father comes a new inheritance. You have been snatched from the devil's cradle and adopted into the Family of God. You are forgiven and free because the Good Samaritan is now your Brother in the flesh, Jesus Christ. You will inherit eternal life because God himself has made himself your Father who art in heaven. And now you also have a place at the Family Table, where the Host is also the Meal. The Good Samaritan is here today to bind up your wounds again, to pour the wine of his Blood into you and give you life. Beloved child of God: rejoice, for He is your Neighbor who has mercy upon you.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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