

Trinity 13 (2026) (R)

When I was in college, we had mandatory chapel several days a week. If you missed so many times, you did not graduate.

Most of the programs – I won’t call them services – were incredibly boring, though on occasion we did have an inspiring speaker. I can count them on the fingers of one hand!

Since the only requirement was that a warm body was occupying the seat, what students would do – or at least what I would do – was to zone out . . . think about something else.

When we have a familiar reading, as we have in today’s Gospel, it might be tempting to say, “I’ve heard that one about the Good Samaritan before,” and zone out.

Familiar passages are tricky for both those who give sermons and those who hear them.

But before you zone out, let me suggest that passages like this are diamond mines. The more we dig, the more we find. Let's approach today's passage in this seeking spirit.

Again, who has not heard of the Good Samaritan?

Organizations have made "Good Samaritan" part of their name. In our own community, we have the Good Samaritans of Fannin County, an interdenominational group which assists people in crisis situations. Next Monday on Labor Day, this group (of which St. Luke's has been a part for coming up on 40 years) will be selling barbecue sandwiches in the city park downtown to raise funds.

Further afield, there is the Samaritan Purse, a Christian humanitarian aid organization headed by Franklin Graham, son of the late Billy Graham. When disaster strikes, like the Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable, they are there

to help -- Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, non-believer . . . it does not matter.

‘Good Samaritan’, moreover, has entered into the language of the English-speaking people. Few, whether churchgoer or not, for example, would NOT know what you meant if you said:

“John was certainly the Good Samaritan today when he stopped and changed the old woman’s tire.”

Let’s turn our attention now to mining some of those diamonds from this best known of Jesus’ parables.

A good place to begin when trying to understand a passage of scripture is to establish its context . . . who is being addressed and under what circumstances.

Fortunately, we are not left in the dark concerning the context of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It was addressed to a certain lawyer who came to test Jesus.

‘Lawyer’ here does not refer to someone who argues cases in a court of law or performs other legal services. Rather, in its Jewish context, the term refers to a teacher of the Law of Moses, a religious expert.

Lawyers of all sorts are good at asking questions. This man was no exception. The first question he puts before Jesus was: **“Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”**

Meaning: **“How can I be a part of God’s new and coming age, the age that would be ushered in with the coming of the Messiah?”**

It was a common question.

Those skilled in the Law, of course, assumed they would be first in the queue, and that those who did not obey the Law with the same degree of rigor would be far back in the line or left behind.

In response to this man's question, Jesus does not give the answer we might think he should have or do what a present-day eager Christian might do.

He does not hand him a Gospel tract highlighting the four spiritual laws or quote John 3:16.

Rather, Jesus meets this man where he is and addresses him in language he will understand: **“What does the Law say?” “You’re the expert. You tell me.”**

The answer the man gives was a conventional one: Love God and love neighbor.

Jesus agreed with his answer.

But the man did not stop there, he asked yet another question: “**And who is my neighbor?**”

Why did he ask this last question?

Perhaps, it was to get a better verdict for himself. Loving everybody, after all, is a mighty tall order. Sometimes it is hard just to love members of one’s own family . . . but everybody? Who is able to do such a thing?

For the Jews of that day, the command to love everybody . . . to treat everyone as neighbor . . . was more problematic still. Those outside of their own tribe would have been excluded. But as Jesus will show in the parable, this will not do.

For Jesus, a neighbor is anyone in need. He makes this point by casting the hero of His story as a Samaritan, someone Jews uniformly hated.

Yet, in this story, the Samaritan is the good guy . . . the one who stops and helps the man in need . . . the very man a priest and Levite had passed by and left to die.

The Samaritan's presence in the story makes plain what Jesus says in Matthew 8:11: **“Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”**

Conversely, many who thought they had an inside track, including many of the Jewish religious leaders, would be left out.

Going back to the text, the answer the lawyer gave to Jesus' question: **“How do you read the Law?”** was spot on: **“Love God, love neighbor.”**

He gave the right answer. There was just one problem, though. Keeping the Law is easier said than done. No one keeps it perfectly.

As a bright light shows up dirty spots on a garment, so it is with the Law. It points up our need but is incapable of doing anything about it. That is the point Paul makes in today's Epistle.

What can do that? What can wash away our sins? In the words of an old gospel song:
“Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th-century Baptist preacher, once said: **“Let it never be forgotten that what the law demands of us the gospel really produces in us.”**

What this lawyer needed was what each one of us needs, the grace and forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ.

I don't think we would be amiss to put ourselves into this parable and to cast ourselves as the man bruised and battered and left on the roadside for dead. After all, we all need rescue and God's healing balm.

Jesus has provided that rescue and balm. He is the ultimate “Good Samaritan.”

But there is something we must do. We must allow Him to lift us up, bind up our wounds and carry us to His inn for healing. It’s not automatic.

Have you done that? If not, lift up your hand to Jesus, the ultimate Good Samaritan, and say, “Take me to your hospital!”

Awareness of our need might be the first diamond we lift from the soil of this parable.

A second is **willingness to get involved.**

Putting ourselves back into this parable, why not this time cast ourselves – not as the man left on the roadside for dead – but as the chief protagonist, the Good Samaritan himself.

The rescued need to become rescuers,
workers together with God.

Paul captures this thought when he writes in
1 Corinthians 3:9: **“For we are labourers
together with God.”**

This operation begins by asking God to give
us the gift of noticing, noticing the needs of
those He places in our pathway. And when these
opportunities come, not to let anything, no not
even religious things, cause us to fail to act.
This was the sin of the priest and Levite.

Let me give you an example of what I am
talking about. One Sunday morning I received a
call from a woman in our church. She said her
husband, a cancer patient, had fallen. An
ambulance was taking him to hospital. She was
just before leaving to be with him.

As soon as I got off the phone with her, I
called a lay leader. He and his wife were just

before heading out the door to come to church. I said: **“I don’t want you to go to church today.”**

There was silence on the other end of the line.

“Yes, you heard me right,” I said, **“I want you to go to the hospital and be with Mrs. So-in-so.”**

Put another way: Don’t let ‘religion’ get in the way of following Jesus.

Or, going back to the Old Testament, learn from the prophet Samuel who had some very stern words for Saul when Israel’s first king used religious observance as an excuse for disobeying God: **“To obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams”** (1 Samuel 15:22).

Willingness to obey, that is our second diamond. A third is **openness to all sorts**. The Jews of Jesus' day saw their neighbor as being only their fellow Jews, but Jesus drew the circle larger. We should as well. A neighbor is anyone in need. We can't be picky.

Let me close with this thought, God does not place in your path every suffering person on the planet, just the one He wants you to help at a particular moment. Keep your eyes open for that one and do what you can.

Awareness of our need for God's help, willingness to get involved and openness to all sorts . . . all are diamonds ready to be mined from Jesus's very familiar parable. Don't leave these diamonds in the ground. Pluck them out and wear them.

Thanks for not zoning out!