

Note: Please excuse typos in this sermon. It was lost and then retyped again from memory.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
Galatians 3:15-22; Luke 10:23-37

Our Holy Gospel is preceded by these words of our Lord:

*“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

Having been rejected by yet two more unrepentant cities, Chorazin and Bethsaida, and just before encountering the lawyer in our Holy Gospel, while the seventy-two, fresh from having been sent out in His name were still rejoicing in all that they had seen and done, that even demons had submitted to them, Jesus reminds us as He speaks to His Father that the gospel was and is still today foolishness to the masses, hidden from many who persist stubbornly in fallen wisdom and pride, and that it is only received truly by those who are humbled and made simple before God like little children, like Cole Daniel Romain here in our service today.

And that’s when this lawyer comes proudly before Jesus, as if Jesus should have been honored to have him in His presence, and asks a question of our Lord as if the Lord should be tickled just to have such a learned man speak to Him. *“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* he asks, and Jesus plays along. *“You know so much, you tell me,”* Jesus in essence answers. And the lawyer remembered Catechism class. He hadn’t taken it to heart—isn’t that terrible, when Catechism students do that, young or old—but he still remembered some of what he learned, which is a good thing I guess, if only he would have applied it to himself in faith. And so he answers. *“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.”*

Let me tell you a parable of sorts. Give me some leeway. I’m no Jesus, so I’ll do my best. One day Pastor Johnston ran into LeBron James. “Hello, LeBron James,” Pastor Johnston said. “Hey, you’re that Pastor Johnston, aren’t you,” LeBron replied. Pastor was taken back that he was so renowned for his preaching and teaching, but kept his concentration and remembered to ask the question he’d always planned to ask if he met LeBron James: “Hey, LeBron, how do you dunk. I’ve always wanted to.” “Jump,” LeBron said.

What do you think? Is it going to help? He’s right, isn’t he? Jumping is how you dunk, unless you’re Manute Bol. Remember him? Seven feet and seven inches tall. Unfortunately, I’m five foot ten on a good day. Jumping is how I would dunk, but I can’t jump.

*“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.”* In other words, jump. Listen again to St. Paul from our second lesson, *“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”*

Jump and you’ll dunk. Keep the law perfectly and you’d live. Problem is, I can’t jump, and we can’t keep the law perfectly. We’re, as St. Paul says, *imprisoned under sin*. We’re

conceived in sin, born in sin, and confirm that family tradition of sin every day of our lives. If we could keep the law perfectly, we'd be saved through it, but if we could keep the law perfectly, there'd be no one to save, because we'd have nothing to be saved from. Unfortunately, there's plenty of saving to be done, because since the fall into sin in Eden, we've been born without even a shot of being saved by the law, born to fail, born in failure, born trapped in sin already and growing ever better at sinning as we age.

The lawyer was the Levite and the priest. He saw no need to help a pathetic man in need, because he thought he was good already, had done enough to be saved, that surely God must be cool with him. Why show mercy and compassion to this poor, dying man when this man in turn did not see himself as one in desperate need, one poor and dying, lost without the mercy and compassion of Christ. That is what he was, poor and dying, but that is not what he was willing to confess himself to be.

The Samaritan in the parable knew no pretense. He was a poor, miserable wretch, looked down upon by many Jews as a half-breed and perhaps even as unredeemable. When he saw this man in need, he saw in that man himself, and he sought to treat that man as he would have himself treated, as he as a believer had indeed been treated by God, like the tax collector of a few weeks ago, with mercy and compassion.

You are the poor, dying man. Jesus is the Samaritan. He who became sin for you, became the most cursed, poorest, and dying of all has not only stumbled upon you in your need, but sought you out to save you, to care for you, heal you, and shelter you in His heavenly mansions at His own expense, at the price of His own blood. He saw in you who did not live next door to Him, but well below Him in this giant mess of a world, well beneath His heavenly glory, His neighbor, and conceived of the Spirit and born of Mary He descended into your ditch and pulled out and saved you, redeemed you. His works for you are your salvation.

*"And who is my neighbor?"* the lawyer had continued, trying to redeem himself before Jesus. And that's the problem, we don't justify ourselves before Jesus. Jesus justifies us before Jesus by His death and resurrection, through the faith in Him He grants us by His Spirit and through His gifts of Word and Sacrament. And the answer is clear in the parable, isn't it? God will leave no doubt who your neighbor is. He will put your neighbor right in your life. Your neighbor is your spouse. Love and forgive him or her as you've been forgiven, shown mercy and compassion, not because of your merit, but because of your need. And your parent is your neighbor, your child, your employee, your employer, your student, your teacher, your brother and sister in Christ, and you get the point.

Love your neighbor as you in turn have been loved, not because you expect salvation in doing so, but because you have already received salvation by Jesus doing the same for you. And in that way, it's no longer jumping. No, it's Jesus descending low to lift you up to do what you, dead in your trespasses and sins, imprisoned in sin from birth, could not do before: truly love, both God and neighbor. And God can think of no better way for us to love Him here than by holding to His Word and seeing Him in the person of our neighbor. Amen.