

“You don’t need to be good” Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “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.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.”

Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Good Samaritan. This probably is one of the best known parables of Jesus, and probably this is one of the most often misunderstood parables as well. And what good does it do, if we don’t understand it. Today we’ll try to see what Jesus is teaching us with this parable.

Quite often people look at this parable as guidelines for Christian life, or even more generally as good moral guidelines for any person. For there are always people who are in trouble, and then we need to give them a hand.

At first sight it seems that this parable teaches that there are these good people in the world, who are like this good Samaritan, and then there are these hypocritical people who are like this priest and the Levite, who just think about themselves.

In a way we can say that this parable is used by both, non-Christians and Christians alike. Christians may want to think that they are like the good Samaritan, and those outside are indifferent like the priest and the Levite. Sometimes it can be quite true.

Also non-Christians who strive to be moral people may want to think exactly the same, that they are really compassionate and caring people, while these Christians are hypocrites like the priest and the Levite. Again, sometimes it can be so.

Is this really what we can learn from this parable? Let's see. So there was this lawyer, that is, a religious teacher and expert, and he asked Jesus: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

This is the question that all moral people essentially ask. 'What shall I do to be a good person, to appease my conscience, and if there is some kind of an eternal accountability, that I may do well?'

This is the question that all religions ask and try to answer. 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' This is an assumption behind all religions and systems of morality that there are some kind of principles, or guidelines that one needs to follow and then you will be fine.

Just to make it clear, – where is the focus in this question? On me, what shall I do? This is what people ask consciously or unconsciously. What shall I do? For we all have this sense of accountability and this urge to justify our lives.

The idea behind this question is that ultimately our standing before God, or our fate in eternity depends on what we do. That there is some kind of a right path which will lead us to eternal blessings. It is then up to us, to live accordingly.

This is how most good people out there think, unfortunately this is how many Christians think as well. Jesus, as we can see, plays along. 'OK, if you want to inherit eternal life by doing something, what does the Word of God tell you?'

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strengths, and your neighbour as yourself." "Good," Jesus replied, "great answer, do this and you will live."

Think about it, – you should love your God with all your being, all the time, without failing, and you should love your neighbour as yourself, all the time, without failing. Do this and you will live.

The lawyer asked: "What should I do? How high should I jump?" And Jesus replied: "Fine, if you want to do it on your own, here it is, - jump 7 meters high and you will get there." That's really comforting, right? Puts things into right perspective.

The lawyer realized that he can't jump that high, so he wanted to lower the bar. How? Obviously you can't ask: "Can I love God less?" What remains is the neighbour.

You should try to lower the bar by narrowing down who your neighbour is. This is what he did: "Who is my neighbour?" You see, by asking 'who is my neighbour?' he at the same time asked 'and who is not'. He wanted to love a certain group of people, and to feel free to ignore all others. Isn't that what we all want?

And then Jesus told this parable. “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”

When Jesus told these parables they were situated in the 1st century realities. What we know is that this was quite a dangerous road and robberies there were not rare. Now the priest was going down the same road.

Where was he going? Most probably to perform his services in the Temple. There was a long list of requirements for the priests if they wanted to be properly prepared for their service. Ritual purity was one of the most important ones.

The man of the road was naked and half dead. Or maybe he was already dead. What if the priest touches the dead person and can't perform his duties anymore? What will happen with his family?

What if he touches the man and then hides this fact and someone finds it out. Then his future career and even his life can be in danger. Not an easy choice. And don't forget about the robbers; they could still be hiding and waiting for the next victim. What is that was a trap?

The priest by no means was a hypocrite. Just a sensible person ... as we all are. What about the Levite? When you travel on the road like this you need to learn from footprints who went before you. The Levite probably new about the priest, he may have been even associated with the priest.

He would see that the priest have passed by the half dead man. If the priest didn't touch him, why would the Levite? And if he did help this man, then what light would it shed to the priest? Thus the Levite passed by, and he was by no means indifferent. Just the situation was very awkward.

Now the third character travelled on the same road. Jesus' listeners from this parable would expect that the third one could be simply Jewish lay person. Instead Jesus introduces the Samaritan.

As you probably know Jews hated Samaritans. There were historical and national reasons for it. The fact was, they hated them and considered them to be a lower class people. How shocking would it be to hear that the Samaritan was the one who had compassion?!

Now we need to see how radical were the actions of the Samaritan. He saw that at least a few people had passed the dead man. Still, he chose to stop and check him.

He spent considerable time giving him first medical aid; cleaning his wounds with wine and oil. (Wine was used as antiseptic, and oil as a healing balm.)

All this time he remained in this place, where robbers could show up again. He covered the naked man with his own cloth and put him on his own animal and chose to walk so that he could deliver this man back to safety.

Then he took him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back."

This has to be explained. Remember, Jews hated Samaritans, and that was a time when blood vengeance was a part of life. Now, imagine - this hated Samaritan was bringing half dead man into Jewish village.

Where blind hatred reigns there is no much place for reasonable actions. We can see it today in our society, when we debate social issues. It is enough for someone to point finger to their opponents and cry out 'bigots', and brainwashed mob is ready to execute them.

It would suffice for someone to cry out 'murderer', and the Samaritan could be killed regardless of his compassionate actions. Without questions asked. But he took the risk.

He went into the village. He stayed with this man, and because the man was robbed, he also paid for the inn. He gave to the innkeeper two denarii, that would be a sufficient payment for at least a week.

Then he added that if the inn keeper spends more, he will repay when he comes back. Why to do that? Because if the man could not pay what he owed, he could be sold in slavery, and inn keepers were not exactly the nicest people out there.

How about that as an example of how we should love our neighbours? If someone asks 'what shall I do to inherit the eternal life', then Jesus says: "Do this!" Are you ready? Are you capable of doing something like that?

Are you ready to risk your health and even life for someone who you don't even know? Are you ready to get involved in dangerous situations where other good and sensible people chose to keep distance?

Are you ready to face hostility serving with your money and possessions someone who probably will never repay you? Are you ready to do all of this for someone, who may even consider you their enemy?

For this is how high the bar is if we want to merit eternal life by our actions. Jesus here is not giving friendly an advice about how to get into heavenly Kingdom by

being a caring person. Instead He shows that it is impossible for us, totally impossible for us to do it on our own. Even the best among us will inevitably fail.

Then comes the turning point. The point where Jesus turns everything upside down with this one question. “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”

Up to this point Jesus’ listeners tried to figure out which of these three they need to identify with. This is what people almost always do. ‘What shall I do, how shall I live?’ But by this last question Jesus explains this parable.

This is what this parable means. In this parable we are not the priest, we are not the Levite either. And by this time it should be obvious that we are not the good Samaritan. Who are we then?

We are the half dead man, who beaten and robbed, naked lies in the middle of dessert, helpless and hopeless, until comes someone, who is ready to sacrifice everything to save him.

That’s who we are. We all are beaten so many times; by humiliation, injustice, rejection, loss, violence, betrayal, sickness, failures and so on. We are robbed of so many things; we are robbed of our ability to trust.

We are robbed of our joy and gratitude for all the good things that still daily happens to us, we are robbed of our peace and security, as we never know what to expect from the future, and it worries us more and more.

How often we are in situations where we are as vulnerable as if we were naked. How often our closest people pass us by for they have their own worries, and we remain lying beaten and in desperate need for help.

Jesus Christ is the good Samaritan. He is your good Samaritan. He is good Samaritan for every human being. Whatever your situation is, He cares and He has compassion. He passes by no one. He comes down and kneels next to us in the midst of our misery, mess and wounds.

He stops by to bound up your wounds, whatever they are, even if we are hostile to Him. He is ready to take any risks so that only He could save you. No price is too high for Him, if only He can bring you in safety.

In fact, our good Samaritan was murdered doing exactly this – saving you, rescuing you from the robbers of this worlds, from sin, death and devil, and bringing you into safety in His Father’s inn.

This parable is the Good News for us. You don’t have to be a good Samaritan. You don’t have to jump 7 meters high to inherit eternal life. Jesus is your good Samaritan. He has done everything so that you can have eternal life.

Our task is different. Not to resist when He helps us and when He brings us to the Father's house. To allow Him to love us and to bound our wounds, to receive His care and to rejoice in it, knowing that whatever our wounds are, He can and desires to take care of them.

This is how we need to understand this parable. We are hopeless and helpless, and there is nothing we can do to change our situation, when it comes to eternal life, but Jesus Christ, the Son of God has sacrificed everything to bring you into His Father's Kingdom.

Whenever the question 'what shall I do to inherit eternal life' pops up, remind yourself, – everything is already done. Everything. It is finished. Jesus Christ has done what had to be done. There is nothing, do you hear! there is nothing left that you should do.

Just receive eternal life from Jesus hands. Trust in Him and it is yours. These are the Good News. We have failed and we will keep failing. But Jesus has succeeded on behalf of us.

Now, whenever we serve others, whenever we do something good, remember, we as Christians do it not because we shall, but because we are free to do it. Free to serve others, for we have been and are served by the good Samaritan Himself.

Go with this thought. What should you do to inherit eternal life? Nothing. For Jesus has done everything and has already given it to you. We are not sent to save the world, we are sent simply to witness that it is already done. Done

And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding may keep your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.