

XIII Trinity 2023  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*St. Luke 10.23-37*



“What must I do to get to heaven?” The lawyer in the Gospel asked Jesus this question. Let’s suppose Jesus told the lawyer the one thing he had to do to get to heaven was be a Good Samaritan. Excuse me?

The lawyer would have looked at Jesus like he was crazy. The lawyer considered all Samaritans to be bad. The idea of a Good Samaritan would have been considered a contradiction of terms.

The lawyer is trying to trap Jesus with what he thinks is a trick question. Jesus answers the question as he often does...with a question of his own, “Tell me, Mr. Lawyer...what do the Scriptures say?”

The lawyer responds by quoting the Great Commandment...“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as you love yourself.” “Right answer”, said Jesus, “Now you go and do exactly what you just said.”

Our lawyer friend wasn’t satisfied with that answer. He wanted to narrow down the playing field. He wanted Jesus to tell him who his neighbor was. The lawyer’s question was intended to provoke Jesus into saying something he could use against him. The lawyer wasn’t really interested in hearing what Jesus had to say, He just wanted to make Jesus look bad and make himself look good.

Jesus then proceeds to tell what is probably the most famous of his short stories...The Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the story, a man is traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. In Jesus’ time, this stretch of road was called “Blood Alley”. It was notorious for robberies, assaults and murders that happened to travelers.

The traveler in the story is implicitly understood to be Jewish. He gets attacked by robbers, stripped naked and left for dead by the side of the road. Along comes a priest and a Levite. Levites helped priests in the Temple, in the way Acolytes help priests at

the Altar during Mass. The priest and the Levite do nothing to help the injured man.

The priest and the Levite may have a good reason not to try to help the injured man...they thought he was dead. They didn’t want to touch a dead body...that would have kept them from participating in the Temple services. Although they could have been made clean, they chose making themselves look good in the Temple over compassion for the injured man. In Matthew’s Gospel...Jesus quotes Hosea when tells us what God really wants from us is mercy...not sacrifice.

Along comes our Samaritan friend. He doesn’t hesitate to help the injured man. He doesn’t care if the man is Jewish, Samaritan, or from another country. The Gospel tells us “...his heart was filled with pity.” He cleaned the injured man’s wounds with wine and oil, wrapped them up to keep them clean, and took him to the nearest hotel. He took out two silver coins...about \$400...gave it to the hotel manager...and said he would reimburse for any other expense he incurred taking care of the man,

“Now”, Jesus said to our lawyer friend, “who acted like a neighbor in the story?” The lawyer knew he was caught in his own trap. He had no choice but to answer, “The one who was kind to him.” Jesus told the lawyer to go and do the same thing. He told the lawyer to go and be a good neighbor.

The term “good Samaritan” is used today to describe a person who acts for the good of another person...especially a person in distress or who needs to be rescued. Police and firefighters and others often risk their own lives to help someone. Hospitals are named “Good Samaritan”.

The animosity that existed between 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews and Samaritans is largely lost on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians. Jesus challenges us to go out and show the same kind of compassion the Samaritan showed toward a stranger. That sometimes comes with risks. We would prefer to leave things to the professionals.

What do we need to do to get to heaven? Apply the Great Commandment to our daily lives. We need to ask ourselves if we are willing to do exactly what Jesus tells us to do...go out and be Good Samaritans.

