

A Good Feeling that Lasts!

Sermon for the 13th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: 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?"²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"²⁷ 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."²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"³⁰ 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.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.'³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Children usually don't just want to observe and listen to things, they also want to touch everything with their hands or, even better, put everything in their mouths. Only in this way can they explore their little world. Only in this way can they learn that it is better not to touch the oven when it is so hot or that it's better not to jump into ice cold water... Imagine a world in which people couldn't feel. That would be terrible, wouldn't it? Then people would constantly burn themselves on ovens... or cut off a finger with a kitchen knife... or do many other terrible things. Feelings are a part of our human nature. They are important, otherwise we couldn't survive. Perhaps even less well known than the feelings we have when we touch an oven and it's very hot, are the feelings that happen inside us. Feelings like fear, anger, joy, or sadness. These feelings that are inside us are important because they give us an important indication of how we are doing – good or bad. And yet, they change so quickly. How quickly love turns to hate, or happiness turns into sadness or disappointment. Maybe that's why a lawyer went to Jesus and asked: "How do I get eternal life?" Indeed, the question of eternal life is a question that leads precisely in this direction. Where do I experience happiness that doesn't change into sadness? Where do I experience love that doesn't turn into hate? Where do I find a place where I can be sure that I won't be let down? Which one leads to eternal life? Interestingly, the lawyer refers to what's inside... to our feelings and even cites from the Old Testament where it says: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5) "and love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). And Jesus replies: If you do all of this, you will have eternal life. Actually, the old command that Jesus cites here is very easy. Even a child can understand that if all people would love God and their neighbors as themselves, we would have a perfect world. But unfortunately, that's not how things are. And why not? Because people aren't perfect! Because we have limits. Even our love has limits. And then Jesus tells an amazing story. It is a story about love with limits in relation to a story where love is without limits. It is the story of the Good Samaritan and it goes like this – A person fell among robbers. Not only did he lose all his money and belongings but his dignity was also taken away. Then he lay naked and bare on the side of the road and left to die in the sun if no one helped him. And then, Jesus explains further, two men walked by who had important jobs. You could say they



were on business trips. They were thinking only of their duties. They were priests. They had to get to their congregations who waited for them – that was their task. And now, they went directly to do this job. One thing was clear, their job was not to help an injured person on the side of the road. In those days, there was also another special rule. At that time, people believed that devout people may not come into contact with blood. If that happened, he would become unclean. Then he could no longer do his job. He had to first clean himself with many complicated washings because he made himself dirty with the blood of another. So it's not just that these priests didn't want to help the injured man, they also couldn't do it because of this rule! They couldn't dirty their hands with the blood of an injured man! Jesus clearly wants to show that in our world, love has limits. What was then, remains so now. We also know that love has limits. If a boyfriend disappoints for the umpteenth time, love eventually stops. If a girlfriend never stops getting on her boyfriend's nerves, then eventually he will leave her. You know the arguments. Even in a close-knit family, you know this – children hurt and disappoint their parents, parents hurt their children in the same way.... and how many others are there who just can't cope? And it's all because love has limits. And what if you see such people in need? Do we want to dirty our hands with the needs of others? Wouldn't we much rather stay busy with our own stuff? Anything else would be expecting too much from us.... "You can't save the whole world." That's what we say, and then we prefer to take care of our own private things and yet that doesn't make us happy. Just like the lawyer who questioned Jesus, we want to know: "Is there more? Is there more to this life than just eating and being eaten?" And what if I am the injured person on the side of the road? What if I'm sad or injured or disappointed? Who will help me then? Yes, sooner or later we all need help. But help from whom? And how much help? What is the limit? Who will help all the injured and oppressed people today? And aren't there more hurting people in the world than there are resources and helpers? The answer to this question is known only by the One whose love knows no bounds. And this is where Jesus tells us about a third person and he was truly very different from all the others. He also had his own things to do but something else came up. The man who was lying on the side of the road was his enemy. This third man could have justifiably said: "He is my enemy, I don't need to help him because it isn't my obligation. Besides, he deserves it and it happened to the right person!" But none of that happened, things turned out differently than expected. This man who should be an enemy, does everything differently than the others before him. He gave up his time. He gave up all his money. He absolutely wanted the lost man on the side of the road to be saved. After he had bound up the man's wounds, he even brought him to an inn and not only paid the bill for a night's stay but for any other treatments that might be needed in the future. What is made clear to us with these people is love without limits! And this love is far more than anything else we normally experience. Jesus wants to tell us – there is Someone who knows no limits to love. There is boundless love. And this love still exists even if we don't know it. All of this happens when Jesus places Himself on the side of the injured, oppressed, guilty, sad, and fearful people. Yes, Jesus Himself is the neighbor. He is the one who bends down to me. He is the one who looks into my heart and sees all the hidden wounds, the places that I no longer know. Jesus shows us that He is always ready to help. Not only does He do more than is necessary – He gives Himself. He also never asks if we deserved it... We tell about this Jesus.

Look up! There is a picture of Jesus. He has His hands spread out wide. That means that He receives all people with His widespread arms. Everyone belongs to Him, even His enemies, even those that don't deserve it. But Jesus doesn't just have arms big enough to encompass the whole world. He also has a big heart that reaches all the way to heaven. That is His love that goes so wide and high and deep that we can't even measure it. So wide, so high, so deep is His love that I too can find a place for myself in His heart. Amen.