

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

INSIDE OUT

Luke 10:25-37

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Analysis by Chris Repp

25Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27He 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." 28And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." 29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

DIAGNOSIS: Turned Inward

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Self-Serving*

The lawyer's question (v. 25) is not a request for information, but a challenge to Jesus' authority and message, and to the life Jesus has been living. At the same time, the terms in which the question is couched reveal a self-centered worldview. Eternal life for the lawyer is a commodity, something to be obtained (better than the NRSV's "inherit"). "What would I have to do to get that?" he asks. In good Socratic/rabbinic fashion, Jesus responds to this question with a question. ("Why do rabbis always do that?" the rabbi is asked. "Why shouldn't they?" he responds.) Jesus plays his game, for a moment: "What are the rules?" And the lawyer comes back with the standard answer (Jesus didn't invent it), "God and neighbor." "Right, so get on with it."

The lawyer's question is our question, and his commoditization of life rings familiar as well. We too seek immortality, making our wager with Pascal, so that life as we know it, life on our terms and according to our agendas, may continue unabated.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Self-Justifying*

As simple as they are, those rules make us uncomfortable. They seem unmanageable. Whom, exactly, must we love as ourselves in order to fulfill our part of the contract and get the goods delivered? We are fair-minded people and willing to work for our reward. But if we're going to do this, the demands must be justifiable. Surely we can't be expected to spend all our time traveling from town to town like Jesus, treating the "owies" of every last low-life – Samaritans and Gentiles, even!? "Neighbor" in the Bible of the day was a word that meant something, brothers of the covenant, sons of Israel. Good people like us

are more than happy to love those who deserve it – the ones like us whom God loves. What do you say, Jesus, are we on the right track here? Or will you show yourself to be an unreasonable idealist and fanatic?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Self-Destructing*

Jesus will not answer on our terms because our question is based on false premises. The answer Jesus gives instead, to the lawyer and to us, is the story of the Good Priest and Levite. And that turns out to be a story that is bad news for self-serving, self-justifying keepers of the law. In playing by the rules, guarding their purity, and not over-ruling their legalistic scruples for pity's sake, they miss out on the life the lawyer asks about in the first place. Life is not a commodity to be obtained or a treasure to be selfishly hoarded. It is rather something that happens in merciful self-expenditure for the sake of others. When our quest for personal salvation and eternal life blinds us to this fundamental reality, we find ourselves lost in the darkness of our own sin and cut off from God, condemned and half-dead.

PROGNOSIS: Turned Outward

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Saved*

It is only true life that can salvage the life we have robbed ourselves of—true life that does not count the cost, but spends itself freely on our behalf. Moved with pity for children of a fallen humanity, Jesus Christ comes to us, pouring out his own blood on a cross, washing our wounded souls in baptismal water, and entrusting us to the care of his holy church. There we are nurtured back to life by his Word and sacraments.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Justified*

It turns out that we were not only the ones who passed by. We also had been waylaid, by our own accomplices—greed and selfishness; we had thought that, like roadside bandits, we

could obtain a treasure for ourselves. But these fellow travelers have turned on us and stripped us of the life we sought; so we no longer seek them as our companions. But while we have been unlovable robbers, undeserving of mercy, we now realize we are both loved and rescued from our predicament by an act of pure grace. True life cannot help but be lived for others, and we are the beneficiaries.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Serving*

That true life that rescues us is also now imparted to us, becoming the life we live, so that now living truly, our original question has changed. No longer do we ask, "What must I do to inherit eternal life," but, "Whom can I serve with my eternal life? How can I spend my life so that true life may abound among and within all the unloved and unlovable people who have been similarly waylaid by sin, death and the power of the devil?" Having become the beneficiaries of the One who showed us such mercy, we can't help but "go and do likewise." And so we tend the inn, and take to the highways and byways in search of casualties.