

# Trinity XIII

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Preacher: Seminarian Ian Jarrells

[ 0 : 00 ] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated. One day, a number of years ago, I happened to find myself in a conversation with some Jehovah's Witnesses.

At some point, the conversation turned to the Law of Moses. I asked one of them if they followed the Law, specifically about whether she loved her neighbor as herself.

With great enthusiasm, she answered with a resounding yes. She then proceeded to describe how she'd been helping her next-door neighbor recently with tasks around her yard.

She had very good intentions in her answer, but she had effectively placed a boundary on who was and who wasn't her neighbor.

[ 1 : 30 ] With all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. And your neighbor as yourselves. Jesus replies, At this point, the lawyer had received a complete answer to his question.

In fact, it seemed that he already knew the answer to his question. He knew the law. That was his profession. But he desired to justify his lack of care for others, and asked Jesus to clarify exactly who his neighbor was.

Then proceeds the parable of the Good Samaritan. Both the priest and the Levite passed by after they saw their brother in need. But the Samaritan had compassion on him.

Now, both the priest and the Levite knew the law very well, just like our friend the lawyer. They were leaders in the Jewish community.

They knew that if they were to help the man who had been beaten and robbed, they would be considered unclean and not be able to enter the temple because of the blood. They carried on with their journey because they needed to preserve their own cleanliness for service in the temple.

[ 2 : 48 ] They had decided that their ritual purity was more important than loving their neighbor, an Israelite who was one of their own people. The Samaritan was the neighbor in this parable.

And this is rather ironic because the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other. The Jews saw the Samaritans as traitors to the Jewish faith, and they avoided roads that led to places where Samaritans lived.

But it was the Samaritan, an enemy, who helped the half-dead Jewish man. It would seem that the priest and the Levite would have been more likely to help the victim since they were of the same people.

But their own needs took precedence over the life of the half-dead man. It wasn't easy or convenient for the priest or the Levite to help their brother.

So, he was no longer their neighbor. Jesus Christ was not this way. Christ died for us when we were enemies of God, so that through his death we may be reconciled to God.

[ 3 : 59 ] And now, through our baptism, we have the seal of the Holy Spirit, the promise that we will one day be raised with him. We've already received a foretaste of that resurrection in our baptism, and we participate in it every time we partake of the Eucharist.

Christ's kindness and his mercy towards his neighbors, towards his enemies, is the spiritual parallel of the Good Samaritan parable. The thieves and robbers, Satan and his devils, had beaten us down into the dirt, leaving us half-dead.

Jesus had compassion on us, picking us up and tending to our wounds. Anything that was originally stolen from us was given back 100-fold in our baptism.

Now, we live because Jesus lives, and his life empowers us to live lives of mercy and compassion. This is the eternal life the law witnessed to that Jesus spoke about.

Friends, when we have to try and rationalize why we are willing to have compassion on some people, but not on others, we are not loving our neighbor as ourselves. We are just loving ourselves.

[ 5 : 19 ] When we decide that someone is not our neighbor, we have allowed the world to teach us that our own convenience is more important than having compassion on someone who needs mercy.

If we examine the teachings of Jesus and say to ourselves, ah, but it was different in Jesus' time, we don't have to abide by those rules in the same way that he did.

If we say those things, then we are not loving our neighbor as ourselves. When we don't love our neighbor as ourselves, we are not loving the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, and all our mind.

We love our neighbor because Christ first loved us. Christ saw all people as his neighbor. He gave food to the hungry, cared for the sick, and spent time with the outcast and the scandalous person. He loved his neighbor as himself because he had compassion and helped those who needed it. Now that we are Christ's body on this earth, we must take up the mantle and show the world who Christ is.

[ 6 : 32 ] We do this by loving our neighbor. Now, it won't make sense to the world because the world does not love its neighbor. The world loves itself. Let us not be conformed to its image, but rather to the image of Christ.

So, to repeat the words of our Lord at the end of his parable, who out of the three who passed by the half-dead man was his neighbor?

It was the one who had mercy on him. Therefore, let us go and do likewise. When we do, we will be like our God and Savior.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.