13th Sunday after Trinity
Rolling Meadows - 1966

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 10: 36,37 Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, The one who showed mercy on him. And Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.

THE ONE WHO SHOWED MERCY

Who is my neighbor? The lawyer who asked this question was a learned churchman, well versed in things religious. The Law of God was an open book to him. When people asked their religious questions, he knew all the answers. He knew all the right answers about a man's duty to God and a man's duty toward his fellow man. God comes first, one's neighbo comes next - running a pretty close second. You shall love the Lord you 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.

We talk about people being in trouble up to their necks. This man, this lawyer, was not about to drown in a sea of troubles. He was in fine shape - from the top of his head right down to his neck. From there on - nothing! Everything was fine, except for one thing: good head, but no heart! For this reason he wanted to argue with Jesus. He was looking for a philosophical discussion, an intellectual alibi, whereby he could keep from plunging in, from becoming involved in the needs and misery of his fellow men. (See back page) This question was a kind of challenge, if not an actual taunt: And who is my neighbor?

Our Lord had an uncomfortable role to fill. On many occasions He had to call the attention of His earth-bound contemporaries to the fact that God is in His heaven and has to be taken into account. Life does not consist in the aboundance of the things a man possesses. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. On other occasions, like this one, He had to remind religious people that faith in God is not a pie-in-the-sky business. He made it His duty to bring back to earth those fine-feathered righteous people who saw no relationship between their faith in God and their personal responsibilities to people living all around them. Alas for you Pharisees, Christ said on one such occasion. You love the seats of honor in synagogues, and salutations in the market-places. Alas, alas, you are like unmarked graves over which men may walk without knowing it. When Jesus said this, one of these lawyers remarked: Master, when

You say things like this, You are insulting us too. Jesus replied: Yes, you lawyers, it is no better with you! For you load men with intolerable burdens, and will not put a single finger to the load. Alas, you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers murdered, and so testify that you approve of the deeds your fathers did; they committed the murders and you provide the tombs... Alas for you lawyers! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not go in yourselves, and those who were on their way in, you stopped.

Good people of fine profession not only themselves fail to practice their faith, but prevent others from doing so - not through outright ridicule of the faith but from ordinary refusal to follow through on their faith. The priest and the Levite, fine churchmen that they were, probably had other things on their mind. Busy men, they had more important things to do. Both saw the poor beggar in the ditch, and then hurried on to oblivion. But a Samaritan who was making the journey came upon him and, when he saw him, was moved to pity. He went up and bandaged his wounds, bathing them with oil and wine. Then he lifted him on to his own beast, brought him to an inn and looked after him there. Next day he produced two silver pieces and gave them to the inn-keeper, and said, 'Look after him; and if you spend any more, I will repay you on my way back.....Which of these three, asked our Lord, do you think was neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? The lawyer, an honest man, replied, The one who showed him kindness. Jesus said, Go and do as he did.

Why is it that today people think of a building when you talk about the Christian church? What do they think the church is - an assembly of people sitting in pews and watching someone else conduct a service? Where did they ever get such an idea? In the first Christian century people thought of the church as a society - the fellowship of people who loved one another because of their love for God and for all mankind. They were God's minutemen, ready to respond to the needs and wants of other people, no matter who or where they were. The story of the good Samaritan was more than a word painting to them. They took it seriously. Not asking any questions about a man's personal worth, they just want to work to help him.

How is your vision? The priest and the Levite, good churchmen that they were, saw only what they wanted to see. They knew all about doing justice and loving mercy, but they never imagined for one moment that this Word of God had anything to do with that half-dead man in the ditch. The human mind does strange things. Motivated by fear or selfishness or some other dark impulse, almost anyone of us is capable of anesthetizing himself against the whole world about him...It is a good thing for us that God did not anesthetize Himself against our world. Without a good and loving God, where would we be? I'll tell you where we would be, — going our own selfish and heartless way, without a care in the world for anyone but ourselves. Even our deeds of kindness would be born out of a brand of selfishness, looking to the day when we might profit to some extent from our generosities. We'd be right smack in the middle of the super-highway headed for hell - the road that leads to eternal death and untold misery in its complete and utter separation from God.

Unless we see and understand that Jesus Christ is the Good Samaritan of us all, the One who is our Neighbor in every need, we have missed the whole point of the Gospel proclamation. In the midst of all the cares, and troubles, and sufferings of life - then, precisely then, He is our neighbor, the neighbor who will not forsake us. In the misery and loneliness of our last hour, when even our dearest must be left behind, He will be there. For He faced the robber, DEATH, and allowed him to strike Him down in order that He might walk with us down through the Valley of the Shadow. And when we suffer some distress in which nobody understands us or anxieities that deliver us to terrible loneliness, there is One who is our Neighbor, because on the Cross He submitted Himself to the God-forsakenness of hell, and imprisonment, and the dark dungeon of ultimate loneliness. And when we stand all alone, quivering beneath a sense of awful guilt, which nobody else suspects, which would cause our friends to desert us if they knew about it, then here too Jesus is the Neighbor who is not shocked by what we are or what we have done, because He came down from heaven and descended into the depths of our misery and guilt. Jesus loves us and therefore He finds us and binds up our wounds. And

therefore He also knows us. He knows us better than we know ourselves and still He does not forsake us or pass by on the other side, still He remains our Friend, our nearest and dearest Friend.

In this happy certainty we can proceed to act. Who would not wish to do something for Him, since He Himself has become our neighbor? Who would refuse to honor Him in His poor and miserable brothers? Who can refuse to show mercy, regardless of race or color, to any person in his need? Who can now indifferently pass by on the other side? In this world where the infirm and old are treated as if they were better off dead, a world of broken homes and rank unfaithfulness, a world of the mentally impaired and the physically handicapped, of girls in trouble and boys who get them into trouble, where moral and spiritaul chaos are lurking right outside the door, Christian people cannot take the attitude that they will just sing their hymns and be done with it. Faith in Christ calls for action. Fait in Christ goes into action. My brothers, said St. James, what use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it? Can that faith save him? Suppose a brother or a sister is in rags with not enough food for the day, and one of you says, 'Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm, and have plenty to eat,' but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So with faith; if it does not lead to action, it is in itself a lifeless thing.

Therefore let this last thing be said about loving our neighbor. All loving is a thanksgiving for that fact that we ourselves have been loved and healed. We grow into all the mysteries of God when we pass on what we have received and when we learn by experience that a disciple of Jesus becomes not poorer but ever richer and happier in giving and sacrificing and that whatever of his feeble strength he puts at God's disposal comes back to him a hundredfold. For God is princely in His giving and incalculable in the abundance of His mercy. Therefore, being engaged in this service by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

Amen.