13th Sunday after Trinity
Rolling Meadows - 1967

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 10: 37 And Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.

GO AND DO!

Our Gospel lesson tells of a man who wanted to argue with Jesus. At some time all of us have discussed questions of faith with others. When a companion or an associate learns that we are among those who have been with Jesus of Nazareth, the time comes when he will speak to us about it - whether it be somewhat jokingly or with a serious question. He may say to us, Now take this business of miracles - surely there is something fishy about that. Or he may say, You can't prove to me that there is a God or that there is a life after death.

I have observed that the people who speak this way and ask such questions can be divided into two classes. There are those who are prompted by a real interest and perhaps even a real intellectual concern. When they launch an attack upon the Christian faith - when they deny and dispute - they often want nothing more earnestly than to be proved wrong and have their obstacles to faith removed.

Then there are those who like to engage in endless arguments, because they know that this is the best way to keep the Lord Christ at arm's length. Possibly they may also think that this is a way of putting Him to silence. But they never quite bring it off. For at some point or other they have already been touched by Jesus. They have been winged. And now they argue and talk with the witnesses of this Christ in order to prove to them, and above all to themselves, that it is nonsense to believe in Him. Thus they try to gloss over the wound in their conscience and produce a moral alibi for their unbelief.

I believe that it is to this latter group that the lawyer in our text belongs It is not without significance that the text says he wanted to put the Lord TO THE TEST. So he probably was not very much in earnest about it after all. He may have been trying to get Jesus out on slippery ice. Perhaps he was a spy from the Jewish hierarchy. Perhaps he just wanted to sharpen his wits with some flashy debate and prove to all the bystanders how brilliant he was.

At any rate, he came to Jesus with the sharp challenge: Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Our Lord replied to his argumentative question with

a question of His own: What is written in the law? How do you read? Now squarely on the spot, the lawyer came through with a well-known and classic summary of the law: YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOU GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. Christ was not a second-rate debater. He clinched the argument by taking the words right out of the mouth of His opponent: There you have it: DO THIS, AND YOU WILL LIVE.

What was intended to be a lengthy philosophical discussion about the meaning of eternity and life, had quickly and suddenly become a personal confrontation. Obviously disconcerted by the abrupt turn of the conversation, the lawyer accepted the fact that he was now on the defensive. Attempting to restore his argumentativ position, he replied: Let's get down to cases: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

The answer to that question came in a startling, short story: 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. NOW BY CHANCE A PRIEST WAS GOING DOWN THAT ROAD, AND WHEN HE SAW HIM HE PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE. SO LIKEWISE A LEVITE, WHEN HE CAME TO THE PLACE AND SAW HIM, PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE.

The story is startlingly visual. The bandit band had left, and here is this poor man - hurt, helpless, dying. By chance there comes to him just the man to help - a theologian on his way home from church. He had just engaged in discussion of problems of great importance -- the immorality of the younger generation, evidence of corruption in government, questions of church and state. Within him glowed the memory of the worshipping congregation, made up of people who shared his faith and hope.... Now, all of a sudden, he came upon this man, obviously of his own people. Nevertheless, he passed by on the other side. So likewise did another man in the garb of the clergy, who also saw this poor man in the ditch and passed him by on the other side.

These men might have had good reason for acting as they did. Perhaps they had pressing business which required their immediate presence. Or it may be that they recognized the peril of the situation, wondering whether the robbers who beat

up this poor man were still nearby. At any rate, they passed the sufferer by, possibly with the idea of securing help farther down the road - or pessibly not. After all, these things happen every day, and one cannot be expected to do every thing.

Now comes the really startling part of the story: BUT A SAMARITAN, AS HE JOURNEYED, CAME TO WHERE HE WAS; AND WHEN HE SAW HIM, HE HAD COMPASSION, AND WENT TO HIM AND BOUND UP HIS WOUNDS, POURING ON OIL AND WINE; THEN HE SET HIM ON HIS OWN BEAST AND BROUGHT HIM TO AN INN, AND TOOK CARE OF HIM. 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."

This man was a stranger to the road between Jericho and Jerusalem. What is more, he was a stranger to the country in which he was traveling. He was no stranger, of course, to prejudice and ill will - belonging as he did to a people who were openly despised and barely tolerated. Not a fellow-citizen to this beaten up man in the ditch, he might have been expected to take a quick look and pass by on the other side. Indeed, if he had met this man under ordinary circumstances, he very likely would not have been given the time of day.

Did he pass by on the other side? HE DID NOT! He stopped, gave help, and took care of the man who could not take care of himself. He did everything, in fact, that a man could do. He did it quickly, from the heart, without counting the cost. Instead of taking a look and passing by on the other side, he took a look and had compassion.

Is this what happens when a man has compassion? Our Lord said it is. The Samaritan could have gone for help, but he did not. He could have pleaded inconvenience, but he did not. He could have resented the fact that his journey was so rudely interrupted, but he did not. He could have appealed to the innkeeper's generosity, but he did not. COMPASSION - that deep emotion, which comes from the bottom of a man's heart,- made him feel personally responsible, personally helpful peronsally needed.

WHICH OF THESE THREE, inquired our Lord, DO YOU THINK PROVED NEIGHBOR TO THE MAN WHO FELL AMONG THE ROBBERS? The lawyer was an honest man. All his argumentativeness gone, he replied, THE ONE WHO SHOWED MERCY ON HIM. The argument ended with the finality of a thunderclap: GO AND DO LIKEWISE.

GO AND DO -- these are the divine imperatives. Getting mixed up with Jesus Christ has the inevitable result of getting mixed up with the world in which we live. Faith in Christ - wherever it is real faith - produces action: not argumentation, but action.

It must be the business of every believer in Christ not to try to figure out whether another man falls into the category of neighbor, but TO BE A NEIGHBOR in every need. Whoever needs my help - whether through his own fault or through someone elses - IS MY NEIGHBOR. His need must strike me in my heart - in my inmost being which has been transformed by faith in Christ. If I was once inclined to put him off or refer him to someone else, I can do so no longer. I am a believer in Christ, and by reason of this man's need he is my neighbor.

The Samaritan did not ask himself whether the man by the side of the road belonged to his class or nationality or faith. He saw only a man who needed help, and proved himself to be a GOOD NEIGHBOR. That is why we call him the GOOD SAMARITAN, not because he was better than the man he helped, but because he was a GOOD NEIGHBOR.

To be a good neighbor is never easy. We can always think of better things to do. Showing kindness to others often interrupts the smooth course of our life, for God gives us opportunities to help just when we are occupied with more important matters. God does not wait, however, with His opportunities. He draws upon our inconvenience for His service. He is a God of supprises - not only as He helps us, but as He puts people in our path for us to help. He wants us to help, always remembering that we have no claim upon His kindness and love - except for the fact that we are men in need of help. IN THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE LOVE GOD BUT THAT HE LOVED US AND SENT HIS SON TO BE THE EXPIATION FOR OUR SINS. BELOVED, IF GOD SO LOVED US, WE OUGHT ALSO TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

We have a GOOD NEIGHBOR who is always willing to help. Never did Jesus ever turn anyone aside. Lonely on His Cross, He allowed death to overtake Him because He was thinking of us. When we are in distress and feel all alone, He always stands by, ready to help. He has promised never to leave nor forsake us - not even when we must pass down through the valley of the shadow. Now He invites us to join Him in His mission of kindness and sympathy toward all men - to GO AND DO.

You can't just stand around and discuss this kind of religion. Faith in Christ is meant to be practiced. Faith in Christ is a summons to service - GO AND DO. BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR TO THOSE WHO NEED YOU. May God give us that kind of faith and that kind of heart for all men. Amen.