

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers.'

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A priest of the most holy temple of the one true and almighty God makes his way on the road to Jerusalem. He must hurry, for the sacrifices must be offered, according to the ancient dictums of the Lord, from unblemished hands, and they must be offered on time.

As he journeys, he beholds a man, *half-dead*, or worse, having already died. It is normal human fellow feeling to care for the unfortunate, and this man was surely unfortunate, for he lies beaten and stripped, bloodied and carved.

The priest thinks to himself: 'What a poor, sad fellow. What a terrible lot! But who am I to help this man? He was travelling to Jericho, a gentile city, in a land of great uncleanness, of vile idolatrous pollution. If he be alive, and I help him, I will not arrive in time to offer my Lord the proper sacrifices, and should God be spurned for the sake of an idolater? And if he be dead, than I must not touch him, lest I violate the law of Moses, and defile myself, barring me from entering the house of the Almighty. It is a better thing that I just pass him by; let his own people care for him.' And the priest passes on by. He has his reasons.

A little time after, a Levite, a teacher of the people of Israel, a theologian devoted to the doctrines of Moses, makes his way on the road to Jerusalem. He must keep his mind focused on the true God, His laws, His people, and them alone, for he must be to them an example to which they can imitate.

As he journeys, he beholds a man, *half dead*, or worse, having already died. It is normal human fellow feeling to care for the unfortunate, and this man was surely unfortunate, for he lies beaten and stripped, bloodied and carved.

The Levite thinks to himself: 'What a pitiable wretch, for even a gentile dog such

as he should not be treated so badly. But who am I to help this man? He is a heretic, and an enemy of my people, and I am a teacher and guardian of the same. If I help him, then I will be showing Israel that the ways of the idolaters is acceptable, perhaps that idolatry should even be embraced! My people fell into the abomination of worshipping images of wood and stone many years ago, and the Lord punished us greatly for it. Only now have we returned to the true doctrines of the Law. If this man be dead, it is the righteous punishment of God against this sinner, and it would be false for me, a teacher of the Lord, to undo what the Lord has allowed to happen. It is a better thing that I just pass him by; let his own people care for him.' And the Levite passes on by. He has his reasons.

A little time after, a Samaritan, a nation of the Jews, yet despised by them; born of their blood, but rejected from their midsts, passes by, not going to Jerusalem, but away, for Samaritans do not worship God in the Holy City.

As he journeys, he beholds a man, *half dead*, or worse, having already died. It is normal human fellow feeling to care for the unfortunate. But the Samaritan feels not this normal fellow feeling. Rather, he feels *compassion*.

The Samaritan thinks to himself: 'He is perhaps a Jew, an enemy of my people, or otherwise a Gentile going east, an unclean man from an unclean nation. Why should I bother to help a man who would just as well have me dead? And besides he has his own kinsmen, his own faith; let those who share with him in those share in his suffering.'

He draws closer to the fallen man on the road: 'If the Jews catch me dealing with him, they may suspect that I am the robber, and have me stoned. Perhaps this man did something wrong by the laws of his land, and has been rightly punished. And if he has been rightly punished, his punishers may still be nearby, and will grow angry that I am attempting to undo their justice.'

He draws nearer, he can see the man's tortured face, his broken body, his nakedness. 'If I pour my wine and oil on his wounds, I will not have enough for myself on my journey, I will surely starve to death. And if I give him my horse, I will walk on foot in the torturous desert sun. And even if I do sacrifice all these things for his sake, will he even thank me, or resent me, knowing that he was helped by a Samaritan jackal?'

The Samaritan is about to pass by. He has many reasons. But, alongside these, *he*

had compassion.

' So 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. 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.'

'Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?'

'The one who showed him mercy.'

The reasons of the priest and Levite and Samaritan were not reasons at all, but rationalizations. Compassion cuts between true reason which guides the merciful soul, and false logic, which merely covers selfishness with the armor of sophistry, and in so doing, reveals that true reason, that true logic, which does not divide man from man, but joins neighbor to neighbor.

But, ultimately, this is not a story about one man who drew near to a fallen man: it is the story of how the Son of Man drew near to a fallen humanity.

For who is this man that travels away from Jerusalem to Jericho? It is sinful humanity, who has left the holy hill of Eden to seek out that city of idolatrous delights, a city of his own building. And who are the robbers, but the legion of demonic angels? What are these, the priest and Levite. They are but man's failed pieties, who, though they strive for repentance and faith, yet cannot, in the end, raise the fallen man. And who is the Samaritan? It is the Lord Christ, the outsider who descended from heaven and entered our perverted existence. By the oil of His baptism, Christ has healed mankind. By the wine of his blood, Christ has nourished his beloved. Upon His own body, which is the beast of burden which shall carry Him to the cross, Christ leads us fallen men into the inn of His Holy Church, that we may find rest. And with what little He has to give, He sustains His Church, in good days as in evil days, until he returns *and he repay*.

Christ has *had compassion* upon His shattered image; rebellious man who hated him; idolatrous man who rejected him; satanic man who cursed him; upon this He has had compassion. For though He had every reason to give us up for lost and condemn us to hell for our sin, yet He has had mercy, which is His eternal reason,

His everlasting logic. For *He is love*. His is mercy. He is His reason.

'He is the Lord.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon texts:

Leviticus 19:9-18; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37