

The Healing Church

Kenneth Korby

Luke 10:23–37

Jesus Is Always a Stranger

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. My dearly beloved brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, you must understand: Jesus is always a stranger. It is because he comes from God and tells us what God thinks that makes him a stranger when he becomes a human being. We think God thinks differently. It is because Jesus does what God wants that He teaches us and is a stranger, because we think we know how God ought to act, and it certainly would not include the innocent Son of God being killed as an outsider, a blasphemer, one who ought to be off the face of the earth. Jesus is a stranger because He loves with the love of God.

That is, he loves to love us into beauty. He loves us to love us into wholeness. He loves us to love us into purity. He loves the ugly to make it beautiful. That is strange.

We look for the beautiful and love it, for the good and love it, for the thing that will make us wealthy and happy, and that's what we love. The others we are ready to push aside. So Jesus always comes as a stranger because he thinks differently from what we do, and he teaches differently, and he acts differently.

The Lawyer's Question: What Must I Do?

You will notice the strangeness immediately in the question of the lawyer. This is a man who knows about law, and if you know about the law, you ought to know two things. You ought to know you're always guilty and you're never in the wrong. That you ought to know. Well, he reflects that twisted thing to show how strange Jesus is.

And today on Labor Day, we concentrate for a moment on his question: What must I do? The work that I do may be religious work, maybe work securing a good and healthy society, maybe work feeding the poor. May be works of establishing monumental libraries. What works must I do to inherit eternal life?

This is the deep wound. This is the utter corruption that we take work and want to use it to buy God, and God doesn't think that way about work. Work is what He gives you to give to another. It is corrupted in the core, especially when it is religiously done. Corrupted in the core to use it to buy God, and you cannot buy an inheritance. You are either born into an inheritance, or the benefactor decides to bestow the inheritance on you.

So you see, the way we think, we think like the lawyer, makes Jesus such a stranger.

“How Do You Read in the Law?”

Now the lawyer wasn't ignorant. Jesus said, “Well, how do you read in the law?” You're an expert in that.”

As I was thinking about this sermon, especially this morning, praying for you and listening, I thought: they are not ignorant of the law. What a blessed congregation! Our children even can recite it. I could have them stand up here and they can sing it for you.

And then I thought of all of the people, all of the people around us who don't know even that to be blind and dead and sick and not even know it is the most terrible deprivation. The lawyer: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Now Jesus begins to show how strange he is. “If that's your answer,” He said, “so don't come to me with excuses or questions.” The law doesn't say ask questions. The law doesn't say try your best. The law doesn't say make promises. The law doesn't say, “Well, I don't like you, so I'm going to make up my own rules.” The law says, “Do it, and you will live.”

That's all. It's like a man taking the collar off a Doberman pinscher and saying, “Kill.” That's what happens to the lawyer for this strange thing, the strange work of God, and He kills us, and crucifies us, and strips us, and beats us, leaves us to die by that law.

“Who Is My Neighbor?”

So the lawyer quickly answered, said, “But, but who is my neighbor?” For you see, the way we think is corrupted by the love that always wants to go out and suck in the other thing for its own purposes. If it's a job, suck it in for your own good. If it's a neighbor, a pretty neighbor, suck her in for your own good. If it's an ugly, bad neighbor, avoid that. It'll only be disaster.

If it's work—can it pay? Well, take it in. We always want to pull it in so that we can justify ourselves. Because by the law, nobody is right.

Cain and the Spirit of the Law

The deepest corruption in the law is to try to use its work to buy or change God's mind when they are designed for something different. Cain was no stranger to this way of worshiping, thinking, and acting. Like Abel, he brought his sacrifice. This sacrifice of Cain's was not acceptable to God. Abel's was, and this caused Cain to get angry; he pouted. He said, "If that's the way it is, if that's church, I'm through with it. I don't want any more to do with it." Pouted.

And God rebuked him. When God rebuked him, He says, "Why are you so angry, Cain?" Can you imagine how difficult this is to get angry at worship? How [unclear] it is! "And if you"—understand: faith—"do right, and your sacrifice is accepted. Do wrong, and what you bring is wrong; it's defiled. Sin is lying there like an animal at your door; all at once [unclear] you. That's all, and you are to master it."

Well, Cain did his way of mastering. He said to his brother, "Hey, Abel, it's such a pretty afternoon. The trees are just beginning to turn color. Let's take a walk." He took a walk—while he took a walk—to kill him, and whatever he did with the body, to lay it in the ground, let it fall there or bury it, whatever he did.

When God said, "Where's Cain? Where's your brother Abel?"

The murderer became the liar. This is what it is when we face God's law: the murderer becomes the liar. "I don't know." You just killed [unclear]. "I don't know," but then he turned.

He turned in how we think about God. "Am I my brother's keeper? Get off my back, God! I didn't—I didn't ask for that woman or that man or that boy or that girl. Why am I supposed to take care of them?"

He knew this spirit of the law. You pick and choose which neighbors you love, which ones you befriend, which ones you take care of.

The Stranger Who Stops

So the stranger comes into the story in a direct way. Jesus told the story about the man who fell among thieves that robbed him, beat him, and left him to die. It is the story of a stranger, a

Samaritan.

No action by the priest. He just walked by, and probably for very good reason, because he didn't know whether the man was dead or alive. If the man—to ascertain that, he would have to go up and feel his pulse or listen for his breath or something—if he were dead, the priest would be defiled for 30 days and couldn't do his pastoral work. Maybe he was on the way to Jerusalem for a big celebration on church growth, and he had an important paper to be made. And if he would have been defiled for 30 days, he couldn't have done that. So he passes by with good reason, perhaps.

And the Levite, similarly: his business is to see to it that the church property and church business is run properly, that the sacrifices can be made, that the [unclear] has to come upon the altars. That's the kind of work he did.

The priest and the Levite pass by, and the man himself, the stranger, he is a man who would be held in contempt by the Jewish people. Now understand that the religious people who were waiting for Messiah would hold this Samaritan in contempt. And certainly, if a Jew wanted help, the last person on earth he would want to get help from is a—a Samaritan, but this Samaritan stops. He comes to the victim, binds up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and he puts the man on his own beast of burden, and he walks, carrying him to an inn—what we would call the emergency room.

He takes him to the inn, and there he takes care of the victim through the night. In the morning, he pays the bill, and he says, "When I come back, [unclear] you have spent more, I will pay that also." He pays the whole bill.

The Revelation of the Mercy of God

There is no spirit of Cain in this story. This story is the revelation of the mercy of God. This story is about the love of God coming to wounded sinners, to those who are beaten and stripped, like the lawyer was. For the law of God beats and strips until there is nothing left except death.

Now this Samaritan is not only a stranger to us; he is the one who came himself to be beaten, accused, tricked, robbed, and crucified, left there alone. Now we've got to get rid of him.

Such behavior as the Samaritan exhibited is extraordinary enough in everyday life. We would have it on News 4 if it happened among us. But when we begin to see and hear the work of

God in this man, we are confronted with something utterly strange to our way of thinking about God and about our salvation and about the life of work.

How We Wound Each Other

Who are the people that get bruised and knocked around, even robbed by others? At one level, we're beginning to see with some fear what this means among us: children, spouses beaten, people on the street beaten and [unclear]; a young lad bumps into a car by accident, causing a slight dent, rear—ending. The man gets out, two men get out, beat him up, drag him away, shoot him, and dump him in a creek. That kind of thing we can see everywhere.

But I'm not talking only about that. I'm talking about the way we bruise, beat, and rob each other. The way children are robbed by not being taught God's word. The way we are always angry or irritable or aggravated with the foibles, the problems, the needs of others, the way our schedules get interrupted, interrupted, the way our TV is interrupted because somebody needs something.

This deceit that we have toward each other, we wound each other and are wounded by each other, and by the law there is no healing for us. The priests and the Levites pass by on the other side.

The Law Cannot Heal

It is this stranger who comes to take care of the work that the law has done. We are the ones who are stripped, stripped of our opinions and powers, that we are our own cures. If we just learn to have enough self-respect, maybe we could cure ourselves. Or if we learn to live the victorious life, perhaps we could cure ourselves. The law in this way has knocked us around, beaten us, and left us to die.

The religious servants of the law are neither able to help the beaten man, nor are they able to heal wounded sinners. As the priests said to Judas when he came back after the betrayal and said, "I have betrayed innocent blood," they said to him, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." Judas went out and hanged himself.

So the priest passes by and the Levite passes by. "Bad luck, fellow. That's the way it is with you. I hope to God it doesn't happen to me that way." Well, it will.

The stranger is strange because he does not come to beat or to do anything other than healing, and yet it is strange. A big cut with alcohol poured into it would hurt. He does not come to excuse or to approve. He comes to heal. He pours in oil and wine, soothing medication that they knew to kill off germs and to help the body heal itself.

Christ's Inn: The Hospital for Sinners

Christ then took this man to his church. That is the meaning of the Samaritan, this stranger, taking the person to an inn, caring for him, and saying, "Take care of him. When I come back, I will pay whatever else you spend."

So Christ established His holy congregation of sinners on earth. You and all of your fellow believers like you throughout the whole earth of every language and race and nation.

And it is a peculiar, strange people. You do not exist to be the conscience of the world. You do not exist to be the moral teacher of the world. You do not exist to be the feeder of all the poor of the world. You exist with this peculiar power that you forgive sins of the penitent and retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

And so Christ gives the care of sinners over into His holy congregation of sinners, and He says, "Take care, take care of each other." When I come back, whatever else you spend, I will pay."

The church is just that hospital for sinners. That is why the people who are the hypocrites on the outside want nothing to do with it. They justify themselves: "You are a bunch of hypocrites in that church."

But the church is the only place where the whole congregation gathers together to confess that we are sinners who have deserved nothing. We've been stripped, robbed, and left to die until this Samaritan has picked us up. We can become priests and Levites, all those who have no knowledge of sin and care nothing about the remedy of sin, or we can be that holy congregation.

"To Whom Are You the Neighbor?"

Oh, there are people who are very fretful and worried about the robbers and the thieves, the dying, the suffering people of the world. I invite you to pay attention to what the president and those who seek to be president will be saying about this. We are suddenly just dripping

with attention for these people, and we ought to. Except we will not put the needle into the heart, pour the wine into the wound, and have the oil of our healing. It is first how we are going to find something else? How are we going to do this or that? Maybe if we do the right work, we will gather something of safety for ourselves, and we'll have [unclear] to pay for our journey home.

So the lawyer wanted to know which neighbor, which is my neighbor, and we want to know then which ones are to be helped and which ones can we ignore. Jesus turns the question on its head, not which neighbor are you to help, but to whom are you the neighbor? Which one was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?

Such beaten and dying sinners are near at hand. They live in your home. They attend your school. They live next door. They work beside you. They are sitting. They are down the street from you, and they are in your congregation. They are in the pews, and they gather together with you for prayer.

You do not start by trying to determine now which one is my neighbor. You begin with asking, "How can I be neighbor to that one?" You go, said Jesus, and be such a stranger where you live.

You must not be afraid, because you are strangers. Christ is a stranger. God is a stranger in His own world, because God willed, by the suffering of His own Son, to heal us and to pick us up, put us into the hospital for sinners, that we might have life. This is love revealed, so that we might have life in the Son whom He sent.

Those self-healing religionists and self-help helpers cannot stand the accommodations in this inn. They want a different motel. They want a different place that they're going to live.

The Worship That Is Acceptable

In the church, however, the worship of God that is acceptable is offered in no other name than the name of this man Jesus Christ. He is no Cain offering a bad sacrifice. He is no Cain saying, "I don't know where my brother is."

He who had been offended against offers the sacrifice of himself to clear our defilement. He who had been rejected comes looking for us, and his point in looking for us is not to dangle us by the neck, but to save us and heal us from our sickness. He himself was left wounded,

beaten, and stripped to die. But He is the one who comes to the church and says, “Take care of them. When you worship Me, worship God in My name.”

There are those like Cain who can stand no rebuke about worship. You say anything to them, they will immediately fire back with explanations, excuses, arguments, accusations—they will have all kinds of words to preach to you: “I don’t need that. I don’t like it there. They don’t do what pleases me.”

The Cains are full of fury, but you are not born of the spirit of Cain. Those who are born of God love God. Those who are born of God love each other. That is the pattern of your life: the crucified and risen Jesus, the one who picks you up and gives you to the congregation of sinners for your healing—that is your habit.

Practicing Mercy at Home

We are neighbors to them, to those people. They are around us. They are in your home. Children who have been bruised and hurt by you, the adults, and by me, the adults, by each other, by the world in which they live. Parents who have been hurt and bruised by their children and by each other—they are around you.

When the law comes to you, it strips you and robs you and leaves you to die. But the Lord of mercy is this stranger who comes, and what does He say? “In this is the love of God manifested, that God gave His Son so that we might have life.”

The Holy Church, this hospital of sinners, is also the place of the holy life. It is where life is given in the love of God. Here is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and gave His Son to be that purging away of the defilement of our sins, to blot them out and wash them away. So to all sinners, beaten, robbed, and left to die, this Samaritan brings us and tells us, “Take care of them. When I come back, I will pay the rest of the bill.” This love is what we are born of, for it is the word and the seed of God our Father. It is our new life.

That is the healing of the Good Samaritan. The Lord of Mercy says to you and to me, “Let me pick you up and carry you into My hospital for sinners, that life-giving health center.” What does the Lord of Mercy say to you, to us? He says, “I give you to each other.” Take care of each other. When I return, I will pay what the bill is.”

But especially, He says to us, start with it in your own marriage and home. There, be merciful to each other, who get knocked around not only by each other, but who get knocked around by

the very law which they had known and which accused. There, with parents and children, practice what it is to pick them up and carry them to the hospital.

“The Righteous Will Gather Around Me”

So the psalm says at the end, “The righteous will gather around me when You have done Your goodness to me.” This strange Samaritan, Jesus Christ, our Lord, is God’s good for us. He is the good that makes our worship good. He is the good that does the good in us and through us. He is the good we inherited. He is our beginning and our end. And He says, “The righteous will gather around me when God does His goodness in me.”

That is you. Those men and women and children of faith gathering around Christ in that holy congregation—that is the hospital to which He gives sinners for their healing.

So, if you know one next door, or in your own home, or at your job, do not hesitate to stop and try to carry them to the hospital, the healing house of God.

The peace of the Lord be with all of you.

SOURCE

Kenneth F. Korby · Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, 1 September 1996 · Luke 10:23–37, with Genesis 4 and 1 John

Transcribed from an audio recording of a sermon by Kenneth F. Korby (CTSFWMedia). [unclear] marks words that could not be made out.