

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 10:23-37

I have a question for you but don't answer it just yet. Instead of answering the question, I want you to think about how you would get the answer. To what do you look to in order to find the answer? Here's the question:

Is the heart of God law & order or is it love and mercy?

Where would you look for the answer? Where does God reveal His heart?

Many look to experience. The experience of nature and their heart. What does that teach us about the heart of God?

From the beginning of recorded thought, it has been natural to look at nature for a clue to who God is. From nature you can know that God is powerful and divine. (Romans 1:20) Even Aristotle, a pagan unbeliever, can come to the conclusion that the universe has an "unmoved mover," as he put it. You might hear it this way nowadays, every design must have a designer. When you look at the complexity of the human body or of various ecosystems around the world, you can see the elements of design that can only be explained by a powerful and divine designer. Many suppress this truth in unrighteousness as Paul says they would, but even those who recognize the truth of an eternal designer aren't saved by that truth. Aristotle, who was extremely intelligent, wasn't saved by that intelligence.

In Western thought, at least ever since the Enlightenment, it has been natural to look inside yourself for answers to the divine. Eastern thought has always looked to the inside for divine wisdom. What do we find there? It turns out, you find quite a range. Eternity ranges from Stephen Hawking, who says the brain is a computer that will turn off when you die¹, to 72 virgins, to some mystical energy that's akin to the Star Wars movies. This confirms what the Prophet says, "[God] has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

¹ <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/johnclark/stephen-hawking-john-lennon-and-atheisms-fear-of-eternity>

Regardless of what is believed about eternity, morality seems to be common to Stephen Hawking and the Muslim and the Hindu or Buddhist. They may object that this is so, but I'm sure you can find something they believe is right or wrong. I love how C.S. Lewis handles this. "But the most remarkable thing is this. Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right or Wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a moment later. He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking one to him he will be complaining 'It's not fair' before you can say Jack Robinson."² In Lutheran terms, we might say that everyone has a conscience that bothers them. The Law, or how God made us to work, is indeed written on our hearts, as Paul says, even if it is obscured by original sin. (Romans 1:15) Again, however, knowledge of eternity and morality do not save you.

The lawyer in our Gospel reading today is an expert on the law. He proves it by summing up the law of God perfectly: "You shall love the Lord your 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." (v. 27) Jesus gives an odd reply for our Lutheran ears, "do this, [that is do the Law,] and you will live, [that is live eternally.]" (v. 28) The law does promise eternal life, but one cannot "inherit eternal life" by it. As Paul says in our Epistle reading, "if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law." The problem is not the law. The problem is you, or more specifically, your old sinful man.

This is the thing that the lawyer didn't get. Inheritance is through promise and not performance. He is just like the rich young ruler in this way. "Certainly, Jesus, I have kept the law!" But is this what God wants? People who mind their p's and q's and dot their i's and cross their t's? What is the heart of God?

In another place Jesus chastises the Pharisees: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40) The lawyer knows the Law & Prophets yet refuses to recognize Jesus for who He is.

² C.S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity" from "The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics," pg 17.

The Law and the Prophets point towards Jesus. That is why Jesus blesses the Apostles because they saw and heard Jesus in the flesh which is what the prophets and kings like Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, and many others longed to see and hear. They saw the promise of Jesus in the Scriptures which they helped write. Moses prophesied that God would raise up a Prophet like him from among the Israelites who would speak as God. (Deuteronomy 18:15) King David heard the promise that “[his] house and [his] kingdom shall be made sure before [God] forever. [David’s] throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:16) Isaiah prophesies of the suffering servant that will save His people. (Isaiah 53) They all pointed to the person who is God in the flesh come to save His people.

Jesus is the only one who could keep the law perfectly. He is the only one who could pay the price for all sin. He describes the heart of God to the lawyer and to us in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

I hope you notice that the lawyer asks Jesus who his neighbor was and Jesus flips the question around and asks the lawyer who is a neighbor to him! That is the key to understanding this parable.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by brigands and left half dead on the side of the road. (v. 30) A priest and Levite cross by on the other side of the road because their other duties were too important to be delayed or they didn’t care about the man who was half dead. It’s hard to translate the priest and Levite to modern characters. Maybe we would say a priest or pastor and a policeman. That might get close to Jesus’ original meaning. It is not the priest or policemen who stop but a Samaritan. The Jews despised the Samaritans. It’s hard to convey how much hatred they had for the Samaritans. The leftists’ hatred of Trump might come close, but not really. This is more akin to the Klu Klux Klan’s hatred of the black man. It is really disturbing, but this is who Jesus uses. It’s like he told the Klu Klux Klan that a black man would be their savior. It’s like he told a BLM militant that Trump is their savior. When Jesus asks the lawyer who was a neighbor he couldn’t say, “the Samaritan.” He had to say, rather, “the one who showed mercy.” (v. 37)

Jesus says “go and do likewise,” but His real message here is a description of the heart of God.

Is the heart of God law & order or is it love and mercy?

Jesus is the Good Samaritan. He finds you along the road half dead from sin and rescues you. He binds your wounds with the cleansing, restorative waters of baptism. He gives you the sustenance of His body and blood for strength and nourishment. He places you in the inn of His church for your wellbeing. He pays the price for admission and for residence. He says, “whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.”

And He *is* coming back in glory to judge the living and the dead. He will set to right every wrong. He will dry every tear. You, dear Christian, have a living hope that will never fail.

But you must realize you are the man along the side of the ditch half dead. You must realize that Jesus is the Good Samaritan. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) He bandages your wounds and anoints you with oil. He takes you to the inn to recover until He can come again.

Once you understand this, you can show others who have been beaten down by their own sin and the sins of others where the healing balm of baptism is. You can bring them to the inn to be fed with the sustenance that only God can provide. In this way, you become “Christophers” or little Christ-bearers to those who are hurting.

The heart of God is love and mercy. He describes it in the Scriptures and shows it in the person of Christ. The heart of the Christian imitates the heart of his Lord!

I’ve been encouraging you to read the Scriptures a lot. To be fair, some of you may say I’ve been nagging! The Scriptures show you the heart of God because they show you Jesus Himself. When you know Jesus you know the love and mercy of God. And when you know the love and mercy of God, you can’t but help to share it with others, just as He commands. God bless your meditation upon His Word and bless your sharing of His Word with those around you. Amen.