**Luke 10:25-37 July 10, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 10 here re-reading these words. “And he answered, “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.” And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly, do this and you will live.’ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When the wolves come to destroy the flock of sheep what do they do? Divide them. Isolate them, confuse them, get them away from the protection of each other and the shepherd. I saw a wildlife documentary recently where dolphins were doing the same thing to a large school of anchovies in the ocean. They were splitting up this huge group of fish into smaller groups and then even smaller groups so they could devour them. I recently saw a rather funny photo with a serious and unfunny message on the internet, where the caption read, “If ‘I’m a Christian but I don’t need the church’ was a photo” And the picture is of a large herd of zebras standing by, watching one lone zebra run from a lion. If there is strength in numbers, and we know that Satan prowls like a roaring lion seeking to devour the stragglers who are isolated from the rest of the flock, then why do we find ourselves so divided in our world today? A word to describe the divides that we find in our world is: “Tribalism” Maybe you’ve heard of it. Tribalism is defined as the state of being organized in a tribe. And while we don’t live primitive tribal lives we are members of different tribes or clans or groups. Political affiliation is a tribe. Sports fandom is a tribe. Fandom of any kind can be a tribe in terms of your tastes and what shows or movies or music or art or books or anything you like to read and spend your time on. On account of the internet you are able to find your tribe out there in the world and join them. These tastes, or even where you were born, or how you were raised, or what you believe they all fragment you into a different tribe that likes those things and dislikes others. And we find ourselves in these tribes in our lives which means that we are separated from each other and see it as “us vs them.” Coca Cola vs Pepsi. McDonalds vs Burger King. Democrats vs Republicans. Rural vs Urban. West vs East. Each tribe feels they are on the right side and that the other person is wrong. Tribalism can be summed up by one verse of our Gospel lesson from Luke chapter 10. Verse 29, “But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

The question, “Who is my neighbor” assumes that there must be those who aren’t my neighbor and I can assume who is my neighbor by those that I surround myself with, the Greek here can be understood as those close by so of course our most literal definition of a neighbor is someone who lives nearby, but it also can mean those we surround ourselves with. Those who make up our tribes in life. And obviously those are my neighbors. I would sacrifice for them, I would give to them, I would help them. I think like them, I trust them, I know them. But there are those who aren’t my neighbor and I wouldn’t dream of doing anything for them. So who is my neighbor? The lawyer wants to know because Jesus had pointed to the Law, the Law that we find referenced in our Old Testament lesson from Leviticus that this lawyer correctly quotes, “But you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And included in that is many other things you should do for your neighbor, “Don’t rob your neighbor or oppress your neighbor” and you should help those in need, you shouldn’t hate your brother in your heart, or take vengeance or bear grudges, and many other instances of helping rather than hurting in the Levitical Laws. But how could I possibly perfectly love everyone? How could I perfectly love God? Which leads to the justification and the reason for his question. Perhaps if I can just isolate this particular law down from loving everyone to loving just a group then I can do it. Like a wolf who seeks to separate the flock, if I can just get one small piece of the Law then I can fulfill it and justify myself, save myself, declare myself not guilty before God on account of what I do.

So we come to this famous parable. The parable of the Good Samaritan. And this man, being a Jew, is beaten up, left for dead on the side of the road, unable to save himself at all. And along comes a priest. One who would definitely be this man’s neighbor. After all, we pastors, we religious leaders, we help everyone, we are the perfect ones, there’s nothing we’ve ever done wrong right? No, anyone who puts someone serving as a pastor such as myself, on a pedestal, obviously hasn’t read their Bible very carefully, because right here in Luke chapter 10 you can see, that the priest, avoids this man and his problems and walks by on the other side. So does the Levite who we would understand as someone who works in the temple since they were of the tribe of Levi. These two are definitely this man’s neighbor, there’s no question about it, they are in his tribe and they don’t help him at all. But then a Samaritan. We heard a few weeks ago of the Samaritan village that rejected Jesus and the disciples upon seeing the Samaritans rejection want to destroy them with fire. The Jews and Samaritans were not from the same tribe, they did not see themselves as neighbors, they didn’t help each other, if anything this Samaritan would revel and rejoice in the plight of this man who is left for dead and kick some dust on him before he went on his way. If there was ever someone that the Lawyer could point to as one that he wouldn’t have to love or do good for it’s a Samaritan. But the Samaritan is the one who pities the man. Who helps the man. Who sacrifices of himself for the good of his enemy and doesn’t see him as a member of an opposite tribe, but rather sees him as his neighbor. He gives, with no hope of getting anything in return and saves this man’s life.

You just sang in the final verse of hymn 845, a rather obscure hymn that we don’t sing very often but this hymn includes a very clear teaching when it comes to tribalism and how we as Christians are to treat others. “For love excludes no race or clan that names the Savior’s name: His family embraces all Whose Father is the same.” These wonderful words of God’s love and the call for His people to see themselves as part of a holy nation, also serve as a mirror to our souls, because we are all part of tribes in our lives that exclude others, and hate others, and see them as the problem and the enemy and do not welcome them at all. And we elevate these tribes in our lives, these groups we find ourselves in, this identity we have as a fan of this or that, or a member of this clan or that group or that tribe, higher than the common love we share as brothers and sisters in Christ and as a family of faith. We care more about political affiliation. We care more about preferences in meaningless hobbies and likes and things that don’t matter when it comes to salvation. And we would hate our brother in our heart just on account of these things, when Jesus says clearly, “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 love your neighbor as yourself.” And your neighbor is everyone, despite a difference in race or clan. And a neighbor is someone in need even if they have no means of paying you back. That’s the precedent. That’s the standard. A perfect love for all, even your enemies, even those who hate you, who are of a different tribe, who wouldn’t do the same for you, you love them all the same and you give. And we fail. And we repent of those failures before God our heavenly Father.

There is no self justification for our failure. There is no loophole, there is no isolation of God’s Law and a way of getting over the perfect standard of salvation. Which is why we aren’t the Samaritan in this parable. We are the man, lying on the side of the road, unable to do anything, unable to save ourselves, unable to find salvation on our own, and it is Christ who comes to us, a complete alien to us, a foreigner, outside of our tribe, outside of anything we understand on account of our sin, and who makes our problems His problems and saves us in His perfect love. It is Christ who restores us, sets us right, makes us whole and clean and well, and turns us into a people of fragmented groups filled with hate for others into what Peter describes in 1 Peter 2, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

In the face of a world of tribalism, and fragmentation, and isolation, and an “us vs them” mentality mediate upon the great love of God shown to you when you were hopeless and dying on account of sin and think on these great truths. Once you were not a people. Not a family, not a group joined together in a common fellowship but instead just wandering nomadic tribes seeking to overcome the other with sheer force. But now we are more than that, we are God’s people. His very own prized children. His beloved, that He sent His Son to save. Once we had not been shown mercy, the world shows no mercy, it’s simply as we see in nature, the strong survive. The predators come and if you’re unlucky enough to be found out on your own than you are devoured. The herd moves on, the flock runs away, the school of fish swims and leaves you behind. The world shows no compassion and mercy to others, even if they are part of your tribe because the world is full of sin. But now you, as a member of God’s tribe, but more than a tribe a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, have been shown the greatest mercy. You have been shown the greatest love because the blood of Jesus Christ has paid for your sins. It has paid for your disregard for the needs of others, it has paid for your selfishness and it has restored you as a member of God’s People. Your sins are forgiven, no justification needed, no tricks, no games, no schemes. You are forgiven. You are made right in the eyes of God Your Heavenly Father, who loves you and makes you part of His Family.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.