



inn keeper two day's wages which will cover the cost of hospitality while he's gone, he also says he will repay whatever else might be spent.

Then Jesus poses the question, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" By that question, Jesus flips the lawyer's question on its head, as Jesus almost always seems to do! The one who asks, "Who is *my* neighbor?" is the one seeking to justify oneself. But, the question, "Which one is *the* neighbor to the man?" demonstrates what it means to actually be someone's neighbor, which in turn proves you cannot justify yourself. Because no one – no one can show that kind of mercy; maybe once, but not all the time. There is only "one true neighbor", and that true neighbor is Christ. He shows that mercy all the time; He loves everyone.

In the moment you became a Christian, the Good Samaritan came to your aid bestowing upon you His grace and mercy, anointing you in Baptism. Thus, the Gospel reading shows us the proper order of things. We first need saving. We are the man left half-dead on the side of the road because of sin. Once saved, having been anointed in the waters of Baptism, we recognize what it's like to be in need of God's mercy. And the love shown to us by God, our Good Samaritan, causes us to show such mercy to others. As a Christian, you cannot understand how to properly show mercy to others until you first confess how God has been merciful to you.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the NBC commercials that end with a jingle and the words, "The more you know." One currently being advertised concludes (quote): "Please consider volunteering and feeling that feeling that you helped someone today. The more you know."

In a godless world, that ad uses the primary motivating factor to get people to do things in service of others; that which is self-centered, self-gratifying. But that is not the Christian way of thinking. That is not what motivates the Christian to loving service. Instead, the Christian shows mercy to all those we pass by because our Good Samaritan, Christ, first showed mercy to us. Jesus didn't pass us by.

And yet, God's mercy toward you was not just in your conversion; not just at your Baptism. It continues throughout your whole life long. There may very well come the day when you find yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually worn out, lying in a hospital bed half-dead, stripped and beaten by the hands of time or illness. The Good Samaritan hymn of the day that we just sang, "Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me" will bring comfort at such a time.

Either you or a loved one is going to need such comfort in their dying days. There is no better gift to give them than God's Word. And as all good hymns do, they teach us God's Word. When was the last time you memorized something? How about we all commit to memory v. 4 of the hymn? Put yourself in Elaine Dean's shoes as she laid in a hospital bed for over a week and a half, uncertain of what lay ahead of her. How comforting would these words be to her or someone like her in such a situation? Listen to v. 4 again: "*In suff'ring be Thy love my peace, In weakness be Thy love my pow'r; and when the storms of life shall cease, O Jesus, in that final hour, Be Thou my Rod and Staff and Guide, and draw me safely to Thy side!*"

While you have life in you, prepare yourself to bring someone those most comforting words. And believe them for yourself, for neither we nor anyone else is ever safe from falling among the spiritual thieves of this world. We are always in need of the healing ointments of the Good Samaritan found alone in Word and Sacrament. The one who ever thinks they don't need the forgiveness of sins is the one who God warns in Jeremiah when He says, "Behold, I bring you to judgment for saying, 'I have not sinned'" (Jer 2:35).

Walk in repentance and faith knowing that whatever suffering and weakness may come upon you, Jesus is your peace and power. Jesus is your rod and staff, defending you from the assaults of the old evil foe, and keeping you safely near his breast. In the assurance of faith, which trusts God's promise, He will draw you safely to His side to life eternal. There is never a moment in our life when we don't need our Savior – our good Samaritan – to tend to us in both body and soul. Since that is true for you, it is also true for your neighbor. As you need Jesus, so does your neighbor. Go and do likewise. In Jesus' name, Amen.