

Sermon for the 7th Sunday after Pentecost (C), 15.vii.2007  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
8:30, Missa Brevis, 10:00 a.m. ELW Service of the Word  
Deuteronomy 30:9-14, Psalm 25:1-10, Colossians 1:1-14, Luke 10:25-37

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

[And Jesus said to the lawyer:] "Which of these three, do you think, *was a neighbor to the man* who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

-- Luke 10:36,37

'Who is my neighbor?' With the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Our Lord indeed answers the lawyer's question, but not in the way he asked it. This student of the Law of God, of the Scriptures and of what they teach about the moral and ritual obligations of God's covenant people, is a seeker after objective truth. He wants to know what God says and commands, not Who God is as His Lord. He

wants to know to which people he is morally obliged by God's Law, not who it is to whom he is called by God to live as neighbor. The lawyer poses his question to Jesus, and Jesus, by posing *His* question to the lawyer, and to us, gets all who hear today's Gospel to open their minds to a new question entirely: Who am I? What am I here for?

The answer to that question becomes evident where my path intersects that of someone in need. In Edward Lewis Wallant's novel, *The Pawnbroker*, Sol Nazerman, a Holocaust survivor who lost everything to the Nazis, his entire family, his identity as a professor of science, his capacity to feel, everything in fact except a basic instinct for survival, finds himself working in a business belonging to his extended family, a pawn shop in Spanish Harlem, New York City. To him, hour after hour, day after day, comes a stream of human misery, the

poor who are desperate to pawn objects of only sentimental value, things they will never redeem, things that will never be bought by anyone, for a dollar or two to buy food or alcohol or shelter for the night. "Where do they all come from?" the Pawnbroker asks himself. They want to tell them their stories. They sense the suffering and loss he has known, some of them pawning their worthless heirlooms, Sol suspects, just so as to be able to talk to someone. But he doesn't want their stories, anymore than he wants their unsellable junk, junk like the hollow shell of his own life.

And he doesn't want them, not any of them, until he hires a young man who wants to learn from him, who wants to be his student, not a student of chemical engineering, but an apprentice in the trade of appraising gems and precious metals, especially gold. The boy studies

with him after hours, hours that the Pawnbroker gives to him, the first gift of himself he has given since the great indignity and loss of his war experience. Sol becomes a father and a teacher to the boy, a *neighbor*, a fellow human being, a fellow sufferer to him, and this the man with no feelings discovers about himself as he weeps uncontrollably, holding the young man in his arms as he dies of gunshot wounds from thugs because he would not steal from his teacher.

By asking His questioner to put himself in the story of the Good Samaritan, by then asking the lawyer which one was a neighbor *to* the man who had been beaten and left for dead by robbers, Our Lord places us on a path, if we will but take it. That path is to stop asking to whom we are obliged and who is obliged to us, but rather, to discover who we truly are by being there for

others, not just for those we plan to help and want to help, but the very next sufferer we meet on our path in life.

That discovery may not be a pleasant one. It will mean sacrifice. It may mean suffering and tears which cannot be wiped away in this life. It will mean knowing that we are not just tiptoeing through life, staying out of trouble as we are supposed to do, but that we are *alive* and *engaged* through our involvement in the lives of others, that the image of God in which we were created is not simply an abstract idea, but that it is who we really are now and who we shall be forever by the grace of the Holy Spirit and the light of God's Word to us in Jesus Christ, God's own and only Son Who fell among *us* and was left for dead on the Cross of our salvation! ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

✠Amen.

S. D. G.