



The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Savior

Sabbath Survival Kit



SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SUNDAY, JULY 15, 2007

God can be as near as a neighbor, and our opportunities to share God's love are as close as the words that leave our lips. The peace of Christ we exchange in this community we also take with us into the world to share with others.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord God, your mercy delights us, and the world longs for your loving care. Hear the cries of everyone in need, and turn our hearts to love our neighbors with the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

WORD

FIRST LESSON - DEUTERONOMY 30:9-14

And the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, when you obey the Lord your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

SECOND LESSON - COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit. For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

HOLY GOSPEL - LUKE 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 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 given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 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."

Organizations, including churches, have good track records when it comes to helping meet the needs of others. We send meals to My Father's House in Camden every week of the year. We gather items for our pantry where they are stacked, bagged, and delivered to those having trouble making ends meet. These ministries take planning, coordinating, advertising, volunteers willing to serve, and the use of modern technology to help in the process. Ed Nace and others from our Synod just returned from a mission trip to Bosnia, an even more complex effort of scheduling and coordinating. Last Sunday Pastor Wayne talked about the Youth Mission trip to NC to help build houses for Habitat for Humanity. There were beginning and ending times to that trip. Hosts provided food and a place to sleep; where Pastor Wayne and the 5 youth would be working was also pre-determined.

I have been criticized, and rightfully so, for not being very spontaneous. If someone calls and asks me if I am free on a particular night, I usually hesitate, then hem and haw for a minute, because I have to check my precious schedule, even if nothing is written on the calendar. 'There must be something I was planning to do,' I think to myself. All of this is ironic because professionally, in pastoral ministry, I basically never stick to a planned agenda. I am constantly rewriting lists, even on a daily basis, just as Pastor Wayne is regularly checking and shifting the schedule on his Blackberry. But even when we reschedule, there is usually some degree of organizing to allow opportunity to show compassion. So, first I'll meet with so and so in the office, after I email them to make sure the time is suitable, and then, later in the afternoon I'll have time to make a hospital visit before my 5:30 meeting. Planned, calculated, part of our servanthood, part of the mission and ministry we do together.

But how do we show mercy when sudden, expected opportunities appear, especially when it challenges the very essence of who we are? That's what today's Gospel lesson, the familiar story of the Good Samaritan, is all about.

On Monday I was driving on Haddon Ave. to Cooper Hospital in Camden to visit Carla Wright. Driving in particular the stretch between Lourdes Hospital and Cooper, I asked myself, 'Would I be willing to stop and assist someone who was in obvious need?' Racism would not be an issue for me personally, but danger could be a real deterrent. I am reminded from our text that the Good Samaritan stopped to help a man victimized by robbers who left him "half dead" – a definite element of danger. Getting back to Haddon Ave., I could call 911 (isn't that why God invented cellphones?) But, worst case scenario, I forgot my cellphone; the battery in it died; I'm concerned about police response time; nobody else is coming to help. The fear factor is a reality we must face up to; situations can become very risky.

Selfishness may be another issue. Don't we like to consider ourselves unselfish; and at times we are; giving our money, our skills, and even some of our time. But when an unexpected need comes up, demanding more than a quick fix, a convenient investment; when we stop to count the cost, the amount of commitment we will have to make, our willingness to show mercy is jeopardized. Especially when we compare ourselves to the extent to which the Good Samaritan acted as a servant. His effort went way beyond minimal first aid.

We must return to the racism question. It really raises the issue, 'Who is my neighbor? Or perhaps 'Who is my enemy? Where do I draw boundaries? Who will I drive by, reasoning that person is not worthy of my time and attention?' If we're honest, what prejudices define us? It too might become an issue of fear; do I trust God to get me through this situation? When Jesus asked the inquiring lawyer, 'which of these 3 was a neighbor to the man who was victimized,' his response was "the one who showed him mercy." He couldn't even say the word Samaritan, afraid perhaps that he would choke on it. Consciously, or sub-consciously, through years of conditioning and experience, we define the boundaries of our compassion.

Agenda-driven, fearful, selfish, prejudiced. Nonetheless, Jesus says 'go and do likewise.' The truth is, more often than not, we won't. But isn't that why we are here this morning; not only to be reminded of Jesus' words and actions, but to receive this sacrificial gift, this unselfish forgiveness that we ourselves don't deserve, but which God freely gives. Who knows, maybe the next time we'll stop and help.

Amen

BLESSING

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. May you be rooted and grounded in his love. Amen.