

TEXT: Luke 10:25-37

THEME: How Is Your "Love Life"?

Dear Christian Friends:

Imagine you are driving down a residential street and see a sign: "Speed Limit 2 mph." What's your reaction? "That's impossible! I could walk faster than that!" Such a speed limit sign makes an impossible demand, even in a parking lot! Now suppose that a policeman is standing there next to the sign with a radar gun. You had better take that 2 mph limit seriously!

Such a sign reminds us of what Jesus is teaching: God's requirements and commands are just as impossible to keep as driving two miles per hour. Jesus was trying to teach this "expert in the law" that he couldn't possibly love all his neighbors as himself, much less obey the First Commandment: to love the Lord with all his heart and soul and strength.

But, you see, the so-called expert in the law was looking for a way to get to heaven. The whole subject started with his test question: **"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"** Perhaps he had heard what Jesus was teaching, that by simply believing and trusting in God who sent him people would be saved. The expert was positive that the Bible taught otherwise. He was out to save himself, by loving God and loving his neighbor. Jesus asked the expert in the law for a summary of the law. The expert replied correctly: **"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.'** Jesus said of these two greatest commandments: **"Do this and you will live."** The expert thought he could do it, until Jesus shattered his illusions and gave him a "traffic sign" he couldn't possibly keep. With the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus would teach him that he couldn't possibly do it.

As we examine our own "love life" for others, we need to ask the question, Why should we get involved with caring for others? It certainly won't get us to heaven. We've got just about as much chance of that as obeying a speed limit sign at 2 miles per hour. For now, let John remind us: **"We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).**

But loving is so hard sometimes! An open orange juice carton was sitting on the breakfast table. Teenaged Jennifer was in a hurry, got up quickly, and knocked it over as she flew out of the kitchen. Her younger brother, Eddie, sat there munching on his cereal, as he watched the orange juice pour out of the container. Mom shouted, "Eddie, what are you doing?" "I didn't do anything!" he exclaimed. "Jen did!" Sometimes, not doing anything is completely wrong. That is especially true of our life of love for others. Our selfish, sinful natures would just like to sit there and let someone else pick up the pieces of the hurting lives of others. Then we try to justify ourselves for our inaction. We ask Cain's age-old question: Am I my brother's keeper?

The expert in the law knew the answers about our life of love, but he was trying to justify himself. He was looking for loopholes and hoping for a response from Jesus about loving neighbors that would give him a shot at actually keeping God's commandment. But Jesus

refused to cooperate. When he told the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus provided an answer that made it impossible for this upstanding expert to obey.

Whenever we try to justify ourselves on how good a job we're doing for God and our neighbor, we need to ponder these two commandments. **“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.’**” Can we really love God with all our hearts, souls, strength, and minds—all the time? On some days I might love my family members as much as myself, but can I do it all the time? How about the neighbor who constantly lets his dog do his business on my lawn or the co-worker that just turned in a false report about me to my boss? Love them as much as myself?

“Do this and you will live,” Jesus says. But we can't do it. We can't justify ourselves.

Thank God that he has done what we can't do. He has justified us in Christ Jesus. Because of Jesus' action all the way to the cross, God has declared us forgiven for all the times we have sinned with our inaction—by not doing anything to help and love our neighbor, and for all the times we have sinned with our thoughts, words, and actions. When it comes to our salvation, we truly do don't anything! But that's okay; Jesus has done it all for us! And what is our response?

That brings us back to what John tells us: **“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19)**. And our love life for God and others is vitally important. Let me illustrate. During the height of WWII, Japan was desperate to complete a railroad from Bangkok to Rangoon, Thailand. They used thousands of American and British POWs, working in jungle conditions with little or no food to do the work. Those who could not work...died. When the Allies advanced to liberate the camp, the order was given that all prisoners left should be executed. That command, fortunately, was not carried out. You may have seen the movie that has memorialized the place. It is called *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

Somehow, one of the Japanese commanders escaped the Allied armies and ended up living, of all places, in a city in Ohio, where he worked in a car factory. Thirty years later, he was finally identified, and a most amazing thing was revealed. He had become a Christian and had been a church-going member for the last 25 years. When he was asked how he could have changed so radically, he gave all glory to God. And he added: the one thing he could never get over was those Christians in his camp. In the midst of such terrible conditions and inhumanity, they loved others and even prayed for their enemies. That made the ultimate difference in his life. There had to be something to this God who would ask his followers to continue to love those who hated them.

Loving the unlovable will not get you to heaven. But perhaps it will help bring others, like that Japanese commander, to know the Savior. That's what the love of Christ is all about. That's what our love life for God and others is all about. As individual Christians and a family of believers here at Trinity, may we always show our love for God and others by never getting side-tracked from our one goal of telling others about their Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Lord Jesus, when your teachings make demands that we cannot possibly do, humble our hearts to see our source of forgiveness and life in you. We praise you for doing for us what we couldn't do. In gratitude, help us live a life of love for you and our neighbors.

You helped the hurting and helpless around you. Give us the same kind of love for those we meet on our road of life. Especially we need your help to see those who are different from us as neighbors who need our help and friendship and our Savior.

Lord Jesus, your perfect love has provided our salvation. Guide us to love others as you have loved us. We ask this in your name, who has taught us to pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER