

My Neighbor and God's Law

Luke 16:19-31

The First Sunday after Trinity, June 23, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

We prefer codified legislation.

When it comes to the Law of God we prefer codified legislation. In other words when it comes to God's Law we prefer a list of rules that we have to keep. We prefer a list of dos and don'ts. That is what we prefer.

We do not like it when our Lord begins to talk to us about who we are. We do not like it when our Lord begins to change who we are. We prefer codified legislation.

The reason that we like codified legislation is that if God gives us codified legislation, we can negotiate.

If God says, "You shall not steal," we can ask, "What qualifies as stealing?" For example if I keep certain information from my neighbor that prevents him from advancing financially and I advance because I have the information, is that stealing? "I mean really, Lord, I haven't taken anything from him."

If God says, "You shall not slander your neighbor," we would say, "Well, if what I am saying is true, then I can say all I want about my neighbor. After all everything I am saying is true, right? Don't you want me to tell the truth?"

If God says, "You shall not commit fornication," we are there to ask Him, "Is French kissing ok? What about petting each other if we keep our clothes on? Does sex in the swimming pool count?"

If God says, "Love your neighbor as yourself," we with our lawyer thinking and our love for codified legislation are there to ask, "Who qualifies as my neighbor?"

We don't want to look at that commandment vocationally. If we did, we would not need to ask who my neighbor is. If we did, we would realize just how much we need to be born again.

Your neighbor is the person who is close to you. That is who your neighbor is. If you are a child or a youth, your closest neighbors are your parents. Love them by honoring them. If you are grown and married, your closest neighbor is your spouse. Then comes your children. Then comes the person who is living next to you.

When I was a child it was drilled into me by my Christian teachers that my neighbor was anyone. My neighbor was not just who lived close to me. My neighbor was people living in far away countries. My teachers were mistaken. They were taken by the glory of modernity and its understanding of the maps of the world. They were

taken in by the modern transportation system and its ability to get people from one place to another with ease. They were taken with the glories of short term mission trips and the notion that I could help my neighbor far away and that would exempt me from the obligation of loving my neighbor close at hand. We have forgotten what a neighbor is. We have forgotten what a neighbor is because we are looking at our neighbors through codified legislation. When God commands us, "Love your neighbor as yourself," we fly off somewhere and love someone far away and we figure that we have kept the commandment. We help some poor person in Champaign/Urbana and we figure that we have kept the commandment. We figure we have loved our neighbor and now that I have done it and that is done with, I do not have to love the neighbors that I do not like. I want to hate my neighbor and I want to keep the commandment of God also, and I cannot do that, but it what I want to do. So I look at God's commandments not from the perspective of who I am, but rather from the perspective of rules and regulations, codified legislation, so that I may pretend that I have kept the commandment when really I have not.

People put Lazarus at the rich man's gate because that is what people in ancient times did. Rich people were the only people who could do something about them. Lazarus was his neighbor. He was right there at the rich man's door. I am certain that the rich man knew the commandments of God. He negotiates with Abraham about Moses and the prophets. But the very fact that he negotiates with Abraham about Moses and the prophets indicates that he thought that Moses and the prophets were simply codified legislation, rules to be kept. He probably loved enough of his neighbors that he felt like he could ignore Lazarus. The rich man went to hell.

Even in hell, he does not understand what is happening to him. Even in hell he does not understand that Lazarus was his neighbor. He is in hell, for lands' sakes. He has lost the game of life. Lazarus has won the game of life. He is at Abraham's side. The angels carried him there! For you neoplatonists in the congregation, Lazarus is in heaven! And even in hell the rich man still won't talk to Lazarus. He still does not address Lazarus as a human being. He still tries to boss Lazarus around like Lazarus should serve the rich man! "Father Abraham, tell Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I am in agony in this flame." The guy is still thinking only about himself. He has no time for others. He did not love his neighbor as himself. He preferred codified legislation and because he preferred that, he consoled himself that he had listened to Moses and the prophets when really he had not heard them at all.

Your neighbor is the person next to you. After your father, mother, son, daughter, husband, and wife, he is the person who lives next to you. He is the person

whose house is next to your house. He is the person whose property adjoins your property. He is the person that you meet on the road or at the store or at the restaurant.

And so it is a lawyer who asks your Lord, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Never mind how weird a question is one that asks what a person must do in order to inherit something, he asks it anyway. He is a lawyer. He is interested in what he has to do. He wants codified legislation to do it. So when the Lord answers him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" the lawyer has the answer, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Your Lord answers him, "You have answered rightly. Do this and you will live." But the lawyer is listening for codified legislation. He is listening for the rules that he has to keep. The reason that he is listening for codified legislation is that he wants to negotiate with the Lord. He is looking for that loophole that allows him to not keep the commandment while at the same time claiming that he kept it. So the lawyer says to his Lord, "And who is my neighbor?"

And the Lord answered by saying, "There was a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he fell among robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead. By chance a priest came along to the place where the man was, but he passed by on the other side of the road. Next a Levite came along, but he passed by on the other side. Finally, a Samaritan came. He had compassion on the man. He bound up the man's wounds pouring on oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal and took him to an inn. He gave the innkeeper two denarii and told him, 'Take care of him. When I return I will pay you for whatever extra expenses you may incur.'" Now among the three of them which proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

Did you see the move the Lord just made? Did you see it? The lawyer is trying to negotiate. He wants to talk about codified legislation. He wants to know what the rules are and how far the rules extend so that he can do the bare minimum necessary to keep God's law without having to do any more. He wants to be able to negotiate. Who is my neighbor and who is not? The Lord switches everything upside down. The question is not, "Who is my neighbor?" The question is, "Am I a neighbor?" The Lord does not want to talk about codified legislation. He wants to talk about your very being. The Lord will not negotiate. The Lord does not negotiate. He does not tell you what to do. He tells you who you are.

If only the rich man had known who he was. Not only would he have cared for Lazarus, he would have done so without trying to earn his salvation. Not only would

he have not tried to earn his salvation, he would have been saved. He would not be in hell. But since he was more interested in codified legislation, he wound up in hell. So it is with everyone who is concerned with codified legislation. So it is with everyone who wants to negotiate. So it is with everyone who wants to ignore who he is. Anyone who ignores who he is ignores who is neighbor is.

And so you need Moses and the prophets.

Moses and the prophets are aa shorthand New Testament way of talking about the Bible. You need the Word of God. Moses and the prophets are those who bring you the Word of God. If our Lord would have told the parable today, He would have said to the people in hell that their brothers need to listen to the prophets and apostles. And since the resurrection of our Lord fulfills Moses and the prophets, even though Jesus did rise from the dead, even though death is conquered, if you do not listen to Moses and the prophets, then you will not repent even though Jesus has risen from the dead.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.