

Sunday's Sermon

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

July 11, 2022

The Reverend David E. Fox

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Year C) 2022

Luke 10.25-37

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

(Bang out Christmas Jingle). Welcome to Christmas in July, folks. I know. I know. I never understood the concept before either. I mean in less than two months the stores will already be filled with Christmas decorations. We'll have Hallmark filling us with months of cheesy, romantic stories of how some poor girl fell in love with a billionaire that owns a horse farm. We'll have the countdown to Christmas, all while celebrating Christmas and when it finally arrives we'll be done with it, though it is to be celebrated for 12 full days. Why in the world do we need a Christmas in July? I'm glad you asked, because I have news for you. Our gospel reading for today points us right to the Christmas story – the birth of Jesus the Christ. Did you miss it?

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-7)

You should all have the image of a very pregnant Mary riding on a donkey with Joseph by her side as they head into Bethlehem where there will be no place for them at the inn. Do you have that image yet? Yeah, you do. Now, for the connection.

Jesus is towards the end of his parable that he is sharing directly with the lawyer, indirectly to anyone who is listening, and to us who read it and hear it today. This guy is walking down the Wilderness Road, not a very safe place to be, and he's beat by bandits. We don't have a clue who he is. Not one clue. He's been beaten and robbed. He's left for dead. A priest sees him and goes to the other side of the road. He's not going to bother with this guy. He doesn't have time. He doesn't have the room in his schedule. Then a Levite comes, a Levite is one who works in the temple without being a priest, and he too goes to the other side of the road. He has no room in his heart for this man in the ditch. You know the story. The Good Samaritan, an oxymoron for those hearing this story as a 1st century Hebrew people, the Samaritan, who the lawyer will not name by name, is the one who is the neighbor to the man in the ditch and cares for him. And what is it he does? He cares for him and then he puts him on his donkey and he takes him to the inn. Still have that picture of Mary on the donkey with Joseph by her side, heading to Bethlehem? Now pair it with this beaten man riding on a donkey, with a Samaritan by his side, heading to an inn so he can be cared for a bit longer.

It's Christmas in July, folks. It has to be. Today has to be Christmas in July, because here we are in July and here we are with a connection to the Christmas story. Oh, but this goes so much deeper than a donkey and an inn.

Jesus, while telling this parable, must have had the story that his mother told him over and over about how they had to go to the town of Bethlehem for a census and how they didn't have any room for them, even though she

was pregnant, pregnant with the Christ child. That story that was a part of Jesus meant that he knew what it meant for people who were in need and yet had no place to go and no person to stand up for them. The world had no room for Jesus in their inns. The world had no room for him in their busy schedules. The world had no room for him in their hearts. And yet, Jesus' parable has him telling a story with a different ending, one where there was room in the inn.

The Christ Child was at the mercy of his parents and those in the world as how he would be cared for. This man in the ditch was at the mercy of whoever would be his neighbor and care for him—the Samaritan—the unlikely character—this man's hope. I can't help but to picture Jesus in the ditch. I'm not saying that is the only way to look at this text, but with the angle we're going today I think that's where Jesus is. And if Jesus is in the ditch, then the point of our Christmas in July story is simple: Have you made room for Jesus? Room in your schedule. Room in your life. Room in your heart. Do you have room in your house for Jesus?

The lawyer asks Jesus two questions. (1) What must I do to inherit eternal life? And (2) who is my neighbor? Though these questions do not seem to directly correlate, I think they do. Inheriting eternal life is not about what we do, right? Jesus says in the book of John, "I chose you. You did not choose me."

The Lutherans usually quote Ephesians 3, that we are saved by grace through faith. Whose faith? That is not directly told in Ephesians. Is it our faith or Christ's faith? I like to think of it as Christ's faith that saves us by grace. Christ gives us our faith.

The Scripture says, Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord. It's not about earning anything. We don't earn, nor do we deserve salvation. It's a gift. That's what the lawyer is missing. However his second question is a closer shot. Who is my neighbor? And at the end of Jesus' parable he turns the question around and asks who is the neighbor to the man in the ditch? The one who showed him mercy – the Samaritan. The Samaritan, the non-religious person here, is the one who has room for mercy, for grace, for love – for Jesus.

In Jesus' parable he wants us to focus on being a neighbor more than focusing on our eternal inheritance. Where we don't just talk about Jesus; but where we re-present the Jesus to those around us. We do good things, because we have a good God. When Jesus says, Truly I tell you, in as much as you did it to the least of these you have done it to me. That means, church, that we not only need to make room for Jesus, but we need to make room for all those in this world who know what it's like to be forgotten, overlooked, had no place to go, and had no one to stand up for them.

Jesus makes room for all of us. Revelation, when talking about heaven says that the gates are open all day long, and there is no night. That means the gates are wide open for anyone to come in. Jesus has room for you. Jesus has room for us. All of us. It's time that our own inns turn on the vacancy light and welcome the stranger, the hungry, the imprisoned, the thirsty. Welcome them in. Give them room. Stand up for them. And in by doing so our actions match our words. We not only talk about Jesus, but we also now show the world Jesus working in and through us.

Sisters and brothers, we may have failed to have room for him on Christmas, but Christ gives us a second chance of making room for him in the parable of the Good Samaritan. May our days be filled with open inns and welcomed strangers. Who knows? One of them very well could be Jesus. *Let every heart prepare him room.* Merry Christmas in July, folks!