

"The Kind of Clever God Hates"

Text: Luke 10:25-37

May God our Father bless you with strength of faith and joy in the sure and certain fact that his Son, Jesus Christ, has paid the full penalty for your sins. Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed:

Most of us admire clever – clever people, clever sayings. There is just something hard-wired into us that thrills to an ingenuous solution to a seemingly impossible problem, or a clever saying that just hits the nail on the head in a most unique and interesting way. Take a walk around an old farm or ranch sometime – one that is or used to be run by a clever family – and be amazed at the myriad of different solutions they devised over the years to solve the ordinary and extraordinary problems of life.

Nor is "clever" the exclusive possession of the human race. I knew a man in Florida who swears up and down that he once saw a fox carrying a rather large chunk of wood in its mouth that slowly backed into the water of a small pond on his family farm. The fox was finally so far into the pond that only his eyes, nose, and the chunk of wood were out of the water. Ducking finally under the water and turning away, he released the broken branch he had been carrying – and thereby rid himself of every last flea. They had all taken refuge on the branch.

True or not, it certainly qualifies as clever.

Personally, I must admit to an unabashed admiration for clever prose – even (and maybe especially) when it has a bit of an edge to it. *"Other than that, Mrs. Kennedy, how did you like Dallas?"* sort of thing. You've probably heard, for example, the old *"Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day; teach him how to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime."* Recently I read a modification: *"Give a man a match and he'll be warm for a minute. Light a man on fire and he'll be warm for the rest of his life."* A bit dark, perhaps, but certainly clever.

Yet as with most things in life, here too there is a good and a bad, a positive and a negative kind of clever. Some of you may have heard of the rough-around-the-edges South Dakota good 'ol boy who had figured out a way to eat free. He would go into a café, order a full meal with a cup of soup. At the end of his meal he would take a dead fly (which he always carried into the café with him) and drop it into the soup. He would then show it to a man at a nearby table and would ask him to just nod his head

yes when he went up to the checkout counter to indicate that he had seen the fly in the man's soup. At the checkout counter he would tell the cashier that his old friend at the neighboring table was going to pay for his meal. The cashier would look across the restaurant and see the man nodding his head yes (pointing to himself and to the man's table) and the scoundrel would tip his hat to the man and walk out.

Again, there's clever and there's clever. Our text for this morning gives us two examples of clever, one bad and one good. That portion of God's Word according to which we will be guided and instructed this morning is found in Luke's Gospel, the 10th Chapter:

^{NKJ} **Luke 10:25-37 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** ²⁶ **He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"** ²⁷ **So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' "** ²⁸ **And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."** ²⁹ ¶ **But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"** ³⁰ **Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead."** ³¹ **"Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side."** ³² **"Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side."** ³³ **"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion."** ³⁴ **"So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him."** ³⁵ **"On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'** ³⁶ **"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"** ³⁷ **And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."**

These are God's Words, perfect in every way. May God the Holy Spirit grant you the grace to trust that these are God's Words and to hear and learn from them accordingly. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us through the Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Did you happen to catch the bad example of clever as you heard or read the text? Not surprisingly it came from a lawyer. Again, for some reason I find it extremely entertaining to read how Jesus' enemies continued to try to trip him up – always failing miserably. Yet human pride being what it is, no doubt this man reckoned he was up to the task. He could and would succeed where others had failed. He didn't have a chance, but his ego must have told him otherwise, so he opens the show with a carefully devised question, ***"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"***

You and I could obviously read such a question and put the best construction on it – assuming that the man really was just interested in doing the right thing. Our text, however, makes clear that the man came not to learn but to test. The question itself was flawed, of course, since ***"what shall I do to inherit?"*** is a nonsensical question. An inheritance, by definition, can't be earned. It's possible, of course, that in the lawyer's mind it was possible to flatter and insinuate oneself into an inheritance. The question was a trap, and Jesus, recognizing it as such, doesn't approach it from the direction the lawyer had intended. In fact walking around to the back side of it, he turns the question back onto the lawyer: ***"What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"*** Masterful, as always. There was no way Jesus could be condemned for simply asking a question.

The man actually gave a good, factual answer – to a point. His answer (***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."***) was actually a good answer but to a slightly different question. The question he answered was, ***"What must I do to earn eternal life?"*** Jesus had pointed him to the Law, and the man had in fact answered with God's perfect summary of the Law.

Jesus again responds factually and forthrightly, but in a way that no one could challenge: ***"You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."*** No member of any religious group in Jesus' day could or would have challenged this answer as correct. It is, in fact, sin that separates us from our God and prevents our entrance into heaven. Jesus' answer therefore was, ***"Right! If you have no sin, you will earn your way into heaven."***

The lawyer obviously recognized the problem immediately. The problem was that he *had* sin – loads of sin, buckets of the stuff. No matter how good he looked on the outside, he had a front row seat to the reality of his own sinfulness. He could fool others, maybe, but not himself – and certainly not God.

But here's where the "bad clever" part came in. Rather than allow his own heart to be condemned – as it should rightly have been (and probably was) he seeks to establish a legal loophole. Since he knows full well that he has in no way loved every single one of his fellow human beings as he has loved himself, he cleverly tries to change or diminish the commandment. He tries to simplify (dumb-down) the law to a point where he can claim he has kept it. He therefore follows up with his tawdry ***"And who is my neighbor?"*** His thought process must have been something like *"I love my parents, wife, and children. Maybe that's enough. If that's the legal definition of 'neighbor,' maybe I'm good to go."*

Again, lest we be tempted to try to put the best construction on his question and imagine that the man is just trying to learn from Jesus, our text makes clear that this was anything but the case: ***"But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus..."***

This is the nasty sort of clever that God hates. It is, nevertheless, the sort of clever that you and I tend to employ on a fairly regular basis. I would venture to guess that every single human being hearing or reading these words knows full well that we are absolutely incapable of living perfect, sin-free lives. We are, in the first place, born with the sin we inherited from Adam and Eve. We are born spiritually dead and hostile to our Creator God. We are, therefore, born losers in God's eyes – absolutely powerless to earn our way back into God's good graces by our words or actions. Being kind and loving to our own immediate family members doesn't come close to fulfilling the second half of God's own summary of his holy will: ***"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** But you and I would like to think so, wouldn't we? We would love to reduce, dilute, adulterate God's law to the point where we begin to feel good about our general conduct. We would love to believe that the ugly festering cancer of our sin is really just a bruise or scrape that will heal on its own. We don't even love our immediate family members like we love ourselves, but all the old Adam is really looking for here is a bit of artificial comfort and peace of mind.

Stop for a moment here to contemplate how often you – consciously or not – employ this same twisted cleverness in your own life. How often do you justify sin in your life simply because no one knows about it? How often do you downplay the severity of sin just because it is not as bad as other sins. How often do you feel better about yourself and your sinfulness just because you did something nice for someone,

went to church or communion, or even just because you only did it that one time?

Jesus himself both introduces and represents the right and good kind of clever. He does so first with his answer to the man's second challenge, **"And who is my neighbor?"** Recognize here that you are in the presence of the Grand Master and marvel again at his incomparable wisdom. Jesus could, I suppose, have simply answered, *"Every single one of your fellow human beings is your neighbor."* Surely this would have served to condemn the man, but Jesus ever wants to be more than just a conqueror. He wants more than just to defeat; he wants to win over.

So he answers with a story and another question. The story (we don't know, by the way, if it is a parable or an actual account) is of the good Samaritan and is probably well known to all of you. What we most often miss here is the fact that Jesus turned the man's question completely around. The man had asked **"And who is my neighbor?"** but Jesus answered with a question that came at the whole topic from the opposite direction: **"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"** The question is not *"Whom do I have to love as myself?"* The root problem was that the lawyer saw himself as the strong and healthy doer of good deeds. Jesus saw him as the man in the parable that had been beaten by sin and Satan and robbed of any hope of eternal life – *unless he received some outside help.* The world trivializes Jesus' message here. They too see themselves as the source of help for others. Jesus wants us to see ourselves as those who need help.

Only one thing could save the beaten, bloody man in our text, and here is where we see Jesus' other bit of cleverness. If man had to rely on himself, man was forever doomed. The "victim" in Jesus' story was incapable of helping himself. The last thing he would have been contemplating was just who he would have to "love" to earn heaven. In his helpless state he was looking for a rescuer or savior. In the same way divine justice demanded perfect obedience from every human being. Every human being who failed – sinning even just once – damned himself. Nor could man offer even one bit of goodness to God to make up for even the smallest of sins. In the face of our helplessness, God designed his divinely clever solution to our desperate problem. He sent his Son (who was not born with original sin) and that Son did keep every commandment perfectly – to the very letter of every single law. Jesus then used that perfect life as the payment in full for all of our sins. We could supply no goodness to pay our sin bill – could not heal ourselves – so God himself provided what was needed in the form of his own dear Son. He then added the gift of the Holy Spirit to provide for our needs after he left.

Clever? Unimaginably so – and more than that. God's solution to our sin problem was purest love of the highest order. It is that love of God for sinful mankind that also today gives hope and purpose to our lives. Such news is just too great to keep to ourselves.

God grant each of us the perfect comfort that comes to all who trust that Jesus did what he set out to do – a clever solution no human could ever have devised. Jesus was born to pay for our sins, and that is exactly what he did. The result? We are forgiven! Amen.

Scripture Readings

NKJ **Leviticus 18:1-5** Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. ³ 'According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwell, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. ⁴ 'You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I *am* the LORD your God. ⁵ 'You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the LORD.

NKJ **Colossians 1:1-14** Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² ¶ To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ ¶ We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; ⁵ because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; ⁷ as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸ who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. ⁹ ¶ For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

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The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – July 11, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#281- (Red Hymnal)

"The Savior Calls"

The Order of Morning Service – Brown Hymnal page 12.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Leviticus 18:1-5) God clearly has a right to dictate to us what is right and what is wrong. He is the One who determines such things. His opinion is the only one that matters. Our Old Testament lesson is timely in that just as the Jews lived among the Godless, so we too must today live among the Godless. God's warning to the Jews is therefore also applicable: beware the evil that surrounds you and do not yield to it.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 121 (Page 42)

The Epistle Lesson: (Colossians 1:1-14) There is a unique balance in the Christian faith. Though we are to bear the burdens of others, yet in this reading we are also reminded that we cannot be saved by the faith of another. There will be no hiding behind mother or father on Judgment Day, for then **"each shall bear his own load."** God grant each of us a strong personal faith.

The Confession of Faith – The Nicene Creed – Brown Hymnal page 5

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#24- (Red Hymnal)

"Lord of My Life Whose Tender Care"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 10:25-37 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Kind of Clever God Hates"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Brown Hymnal page 16 insert

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -#304- (Verses 1-3, 6) (Red Hymnal)

"An Awe-ful Mystery Is Here"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn #306- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#336- (Red Hymnal)

"My God Accept My Heart This Day"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (17) 2010 Average (52) Wednesday (16)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Worship Service
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Mission Festival Service
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal & Presentation

CLC News – Pastor Paul Nolting has returned the call to Fond du Lac. Pastor Todd Ohlmann has returned the call to Loveland. Pastor Joel Fleischer has returned the call to Red Wing. Pastor Matthew Hanel has returned the call to Spring, TX.

VBS – A reminder that Vacation Bible School for this summer has been scheduled for Thursday and Friday, July 22-23.

Mission Festival and Fellowship Meal – Missionary David Koenig is scheduled to deliver a sermon and Mission presentation here in Bismarck next Sunday, July 18, for this year's Mission Festival.

Men's Retreat – It looks like July 30-31 are the dates. Men of the congregation please consider attending all or part of this event. As with many other responsibilities in life, men have been entrusted with leadership roles. Recognizing this fact, Christian men will want to be faithful also in this area of life.

Free Stuff – After a clean-out of the fellowship hall storage room, there are several items that are free to anyone who can use them. They include a highchair, mobile chalk/white board, and a few other odds and ends. The items can be seen along the west wall of the fellowship hall. First come, first served. Members will mud-wrestle for contested items.