Trinity 13 – September 14, 2025
Text: Luke 10:23-37
Theme: You Can't Make Me! But God Can.

When we think about God making us do something, sometimes we forget that it is God about whom we are speaking. We pray those words in the prayer of the day, "make us love what You have commanded," and immediately part of me hears that word "make" and becomes a little defensive. People are always trying to make us do something. Our government comes up with many rules that they make us follow because they think it is good for us and after all, we elected them to represent us, but many of our elected officials hear the word represent as "be the playground monitor," as though they have to make lots of rules because they know best what's good for us. To be honest, I wonder how often they are trying to represent what we want and how often they are trying to please certain groups who will get them elected again. But the difference with God is that He doesn't care what we want. What we want or do not want makes absolutely no difference to Him. He is going to do what is best for us regardless of whether we like it or not, and unlike politicians, He really does know what is best for us.

So, we pray for Him to "make us love what [He has] commanded" because we know it's going to happen regardless of what we like, but it would be much more enjoyable for us if we loved it.

This is the struggle the lawyer in the crowd was having with Jesus. He said to love your neighbor but surely, he did not mean to love people

who were not part of the Jewish family. God would not command us to love those heathens! Oh yes, He would, and He does. Jesus' concern, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, was not whether the hurt man was Jewish, Samaritan, or Roman for that matter. His concern was that he was hurt, and he needed help. A Godly person would help him in whatever way was best. In this case, he needed some first aid and a place to recover and that is what the Samaritan provided for him.

It is not our place to decide if someone is worthy of help. The only questions with which we need wrestle are first, what is needed to help them and second, how can we provide it either by ourselves or through some other agency? The difficult question is the first one because we are not Jesus. He can look into our hearts and know exactly what we need. But when I see that guy at Roosevelt and Finley begging for money, I have no idea if money will help him or hurt him. Will he buy drugs that will keep him in a stupor or even kill him? Will he walk over to Marianno's and buy a sandwich? Will he save it all up to pay for his child's dinner that night and breakfast the next day? Or will he go to the gas station and buy another pack of the brand of cigarettes that he is currently smoking? I don't know what he needs. And I don't know if he will truthfully tell me what he needs or if he even knows what he needs.

But I do know what I can do. I can support the Outreach Center and Love Inc. I can help collect and deliver supplies to them. I can volunteer at the phone bank. I can support the agencies both physically and financially

that act as the Samaritan for that guy on Finley and Roosevelt. That I can do because he is my neighbor. Now, I will freely admit that I don't always want to help my neighbor because he irritates me. I get sick of him never seeming to help himself. I grow weary of all his neediness and his lies, and that's when I ask God "to make me." "Make us love what You have commanded."

That's when we pray to God to reach through His Word and teach us how to love our neighbor rightly. That's when we remember our own baptismal water and ask God to wash away our self-righteousness and arrogance. We know that we could have easily been that guy standing on Finley and Roosevelt if things had gone differently for us. That's when we eat of Christ's body and drink of His blood and feel Him enter into us and strengthen us for service to Him by serving our neighbor. We know that we cannot solve all the problems of the world but God doesn't ask us to do that. He asks us to solve the problems that He lays at our feet and to solve them with the strength He gives us through His Word and Sacraments. He gives us the command. He gives us the tools. He gives us the strength and that is how He "makes us" love our neighbor.

You can't make me love or help my neighbor, but God can, and He does. He gives me the command and the power to accomplish the command. You can't make me! But God can…and does. When we hear the story of the Good Samaritan, we remember the many times when we were that beaten and bruised man along the side of the road. Maybe we were

never physically hurt like that, but we have all been spiritually and psychologically beaten and bruised. I remember the worst night of my life when a friend came to my home and sat with me for a couple hours while I processed what had happened. I remember the encouraging cards I have received sometimes exactly when I needed to hear it. All of us have experienced that Good Samaritan coming into our lives at just the right time to bandage us up, take us to a place of healing and make all the arrangements we needed to heal there.

Likewise, we have experienced the people who crossed to the other side of the road and ignored us as though we were invisible or our pain were contagious. And we too have been those people when we didn't want to be bothered by helping someone. We have been the priest or the Levite who shut our ears to God's voice and pursued our own agenda and thought that whatever we have going on in our lives is more important than helping our neighbor. For that we repent. Repenting means turning around and taking another run at it this time with God's help. Repenting means a do-over. The point of repenting is not to beat ourselves up, but to remember that God gives us the opportunity to try again and do it better this time. This time we will remember that God gives us everything we need to stop our busyness and help that person who needs us, to give to those who can help better than we can, to volunteer to support organizations who are prepared to help. We pray that God would give us an increase of faith, hope and charity that we may obtain what He promised and make us love what He has commanded.