

Sermon Notes – July 13, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 10: 25-37
Peace Lutheran Church
“Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind”

An exhortation to neighborly love exists in the traditions of every major world religion. In Judaism the commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” is embedded in a series of commandments concerning rituals and morality (Lev. 19: 18). This, paired with the commandment to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6: 5), is what Jesus affirms in Luke's gospel as what is necessary for life - eternal or otherwise (Luke 10: 25-28).

Jesus' exchange with the lawyer in Luke 10 is notably different from the synoptic parallels (Matt. 22: 34-40; Mark 12: 28-34) in which Jesus is asked which of the commandments is greatest and is, Himself, the one who gives the response. In Luke, the question is not about the central commandment but, rather, about attaining eternal life – even as Jesus shifts from the student to the teacher. In each telling, however, Jesus aligns Himself with traditional Jewish teaching by affirming these commandments as the most central - the ones upon which one's very life depends.

The centrality of these commandments in first-century Judaism is illustrated by a Talmudic account that, while written later, relates a rabbinic exchange around the same time period in which a Gentile asks what he must do in order to convert to Judaism and the rabbi responds, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation of this - go and study it!” (Shabbat 31a). This is the same centrality expressed in the Deuteronomy reading for today – it defines one's love of God as the basis upon which one keeps all the other commandments.

What stands out in Luke's account, then, is not the novelty of the commandments to love, which are shared widely, but rather Jesus' reminder that it is this love that sustains not only our ritual and moral behavior, but our very lives. Notice that Jesus shifts the lawyer's concern about eternal life to the more immediate affirmation that in following these commandments he will live. This is the moral of the parable of the man on

the roadside, and it is the root of Amos's harsh prophecies. It is not enough to know what is right. God desires that His people live and lead lives worthy of the Lord...[bearing] fruit in every good work" (Col. 1: 10).