



Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
13 July 2025

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

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

I am currently living in the two-week sweet spot of summer 2025. When my calendar is light and there is time for reflection. Where adventure camps are completed and mission trips have yet to depart. When club volleyball is completed and high school volleyball is barely warming up. Where the biggest battle in our home is between the college student and the high school student, both claiming ownership of the third vehicle, both costing me a lot of money to insure, both buttering up to dad for what is needed in these quiet days – an extra \$20 for food for the college kid, an extra 20 minutes longer on the curfew for the 16 year old. And the 12-year-old – well, we are just happy when she makes her bed. Now in this two-week sweet spot, I take great pleasure in sitting outside after dinner, sipping a glass of wine or a little decaf coffee, enjoying the breeze, watching the sunset, yelling at Baxter to stop barking, and catching up on some Netflix. Yes, there are daunting challenges in our world today. People I love, who are struggling to figure out tomorrow. People I know, who are desperate to contact someone they love waiting out another night in Gaza. Members of this church I am called to tend and provide care for as they navigate their fear and anxiety even as they hold their green card or asylum paperwork or citizenship paperwork in their hands. The member of our church suffering deeply, though we are far from Kerrville, Texas, as he comes to terms with the death of his cousin and his wife who just happened to be camping near the Guadalupe River. Add our family's grief at the death of my father-in-law just two weeks ago and the sweet spot is only the sweet spot when I can pretend that the many troubles of this world are somewhat muted for a moment or two. And that is just me. Where are you in your sweet spot of summer? What are you navigating? Struggling to overcome? The anxiety that the meds just won't balance. The relationship that just seems to be so much work right now. The upcoming biopsy. The difficult conversation that needs to be had. The forgiveness that still hangs over your head. The question of how far God will go to love you when you think you have gone farther than God might venture. The decision to visit a new church, wondering what you might find here, as you consider leaving what you have known for so long. So, I wonder what this day will bring.

I wear one contact. It allows me to see far away – which is really helpful when I am driving but not so much when I need to see up close. I share that bit of information because it informs the way I expect you will hear this sermon today. No doubt some of you heard the story of the Good Samaritan celebrating the good work and selfless act of the despised Samaritan while others heard the story and immediately made parallels between the story Jesus tells and the compassion or lack thereof in our world today for whichever group of people is most to be vilified in our current political climate – depending on which side of the aisle you happen to sit on. In the book of Luke today, the expert should have quit while he was ahead. I wonder if I might be smarter to take the same advice.

As is so often the case, the question asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life? Was answered with another question. “What is written in the law? What do you read there? And so the expert answered with his expertise. “you shall love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus replied, “you have given the right answer; do this and you will live.” The expert should have quit while he was ahead. But wanting to be vindicated – “absolved of his responsibility” the expert continued, asking Jesus, “and who is my neighbor?” Oh buddy...you about to get it now.

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead.” And with those words, Jesus will share one of the lasting stories of the New Testament. The story of the Good Samaritan has birthed generations of people who provide compassionate care out of selfless love to help those in need, crossing boundary after boundary, line after line, time after time. The story continues to inspire individuals, shape our values, influence our legal frameworks, and lies deep within the bones of our faith tradition. So deep within our bones that most of us can tell the story like we might tell a joke – a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan walk into a bar. Hey, if you even remember those are the three main characters after the man left for dead – you're halfway to the meaning of the story as Jesus explains.

No doubt there are some of you who would prefer I keep it Biblical – which I think is “code” for don't connect the Bible to current events. Well, that can't possibly work. We read the bible in the context of our current time and events – otherwise women would disappear during their menstrual cycles and none of us could wear clothing made from two kinds of materials, only men would be pastors, women would still be considered property and stoning would still happen in the blink of an eye. And others would prefer that I preach with all my might against the current administration in power decrying the injustice and inhumane treatment of the undocumented along with the injustice of tearing apart the institutions put in place to protect us while providing tax relief for the wealthy on the backs of the poor – whom Jesus says will always will be with us so what does it matter if they are abused one more time? But I am not sure that is exactly



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helpful either – if we cannot offer a way forward, where we can disagree about how we see the world and still be the body of Christ, than what have we left to offer the world as the followers of Jesus who can model something greater than what we are faced with day in and day out on television, podcast, social media, with neighbor and family member alike.

My friends, we live in a broken world – full of suffering, sinfulness, and selfishness with little relief in sight. But it is in the broken places that Jesus tends to offer the greatest healing. And this may be where we find a way forward today. Author Vance Havner once wrote: God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grains to give bread, broken bread to give strength.

Last Thursday, my phone rang and I picked up. “Hello!” Hi Pastor Chris. And my next thought was should I get up now or wait to see what the phone call is about. It turns out, a member called and asked if I would come visit her friend who was dying of cancer. And not just dying but apparently really close to dying. Of course. I might have asked if she wanted me to visit the following morning or to come that night, but even as I asked the question, I knew the answer. Give me 45 minutes – I will meet you in the lobby at Froedtert. And 45 minutes later, this member and I were walking down the hallway to the elevators. Her friend had been fighting cancer for almost 10 years. She was tired – she was ready – but they had struggled to track down a priest who could come to the hospital. I asked the member, “they know I am Lutheran right?” Oh yes, I have talked about you before and my friend was hopeful you could visit. As is always the case, the hospital room, especially close to the time of death is always an adventure or a minefield. Never having met the woman about to meet Jesus or her family – I stopped outside the door – told God to get it all figured out before I opened the door and then I knocked. I decided to wear my collar just in case it might help bridge the divide between the priest and pastor thing. I greeted my new friend in the hospital bed and then met each member of her family. I read scripture. I anointed her with oil. I prayed a prayer. And then I set up communion. I spoke the words over bread and wine...in the night in which he was betrayed...and then I invited them to join me in prayer. “Our father, who art in heaven...remembering that these faithful souls would end the Lord’s prayer with “deliver us from evil.” To which I punctuated an AMEN. And then I looked from best friend to niece to sister to mom to boyfriend and said, I have blessed bread and wine for all of you. After I commune this one we love, you may receive communion from me or turn me down – you will not offend me. And after offering just a drop of wine on my finger to the lips of the woman we surrounded, every single one of them received bread and wine. And after a blessing – I offered a song. Alleluia, alleluia. You know it all too well here. I thought they might sing with me, it is pretty easy, but instead they all started crying. When I finished, I looked at the woman in the bed and said, I want to sing another but not if they are all going to ugly cry again – which brought a smile to the face of my new friend. And then, I began again, amazing grace...well that did not go any better. But when we made it to the end, the woman looked up at me from the bed and said she felt more at peace. And then I told her what I tell everyone who will listen. “There is nothing you need to do. Jesus has already done it. God is present in this place and when you close your eyes, God promises to welcome you into the gates of the kingdom. There was an all too perceptible, “Really?” from the faithful gray haired catholic in the room. And I looked at her and said, “yes, with every fiber of my being I believe Jesus waits to welcome your daughter home – this is what God’s love means for us.” And then, only because it is so deeply engrained in my bones, I shared the words of John 14 – “do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. In my father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.” That is the promise.

That is the promise.

And sometimes that is all we can offer. A bandage not for someone’s wounds but a bandage for someone’s hopelessness, a bandage for their disbelief that God’s grace could be so overwhelming, a bandage for their suffering, a bandage for someone’s fear to remind them that they are not alone. A bandage for someone’s brokenness. Because sometimes what we really need, all we really need, is to be reminded that God uses broken things to bring healing and strength.

³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” That, my friends, may be the only sweet spot we need ever know. Thanks be to God. Amen.