

Dear friends of our Lord and saviour IX + He is the way, the truth and the light. Nobody comes to the Father than through him. Whoever believes in IX will live even if he dies. It's all about IX. So the legal expert does well to question him about the most crucial question of all: "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Do you know the answer to this pivotal query? How do I get eternal life? That's the core of our story.

Our Lord doesn't answer this quite as straightforward as we would perhaps want him too. That's because sometimes questions lead us astray. There are skew or wrong questions. See, the lawyer doesn't really look for the answer. He doesn't expect something crucial from IX. Rather he's just out to catch him out, test him to see how he copes with a trick question. The bible calls this kind of thing: "Temptation!" See this astute teacher of the law believes in the Law – the law of Moses, the highest prophet of all and the one, whom the one and only God entrusted with his divine Torah, will & rule of life at the beginning of Israel's sojourn with him. That's where he found his grounding. That's where he searched for life. That's what he studied theology for and that's why he didn't need anything else. IX knew this. That's why he said at another place: *"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."* (Joh 5:39-40 NIV)

Well, like everybody who has to deal with Q&A, IX doesn't fall into the trap set by his tester or better tempter. Rather he counters with two questions of his own:

- "What is written in the Law?" & "How do you read it?"

IX thus gives the expert of the law a chance to prove his mettle and save face by showing that all along he knew the answer to this pressing question: "What is written in the Law?" That's the common ground of God's people in old and new covenant. It's the master design for our liturgy and hymnody. It's the pattern for our church life and also for our life outside and everyday. So, what does the OT say? "How do you read it?" And the teacher answered quite appropriately in two steps:

- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' &: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'

""You have answered correctly," IX replied. He himself had answered the Pharisees with just the same words, when they had asked him: "Teacher, which is the greatest

commandment in the Law?" At that time IX had replied with the recitation of the basic, fundamental and principal Shema Israel:

- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Mat 22:36-40 NIV)

"Do this and you will live." That's the core of the law. The pivotal point and issue. The hinge of all our doing and being. Simple – no 5 point plan, just 2! Do that and you'll live. Sounds easy enough. So go and do it! Today, tomorrow and for the rest of your life. That is so very simple, that the teacher of the law goes on the defensive and tries to justify himself, so he asks, "And who is my neighbour?"

This brings us to the 2nd part of today's gospel and this memorable story of the Good Samaritan. See, the teacher wants to justify himself. That's what his whole life's purpose is about: Justification and thus earning eternal life. He's not trying to obey God's will and live as God would want us to live like. Rather he wants to get away with his ways of doing things and still feel ok, justified and on the right and legal side with God. He wants to get eternal life – right – and therefore stay on God's right side, but not really care for his fellow being. Well, to profess love for God, but hate one's neighbour is just hypocrisy (1.John 4:19-21). So he tries to show, that the law is at fault, it's unclear, there's a hermeneutical problem, obedience becomes difficult if not impossible: Who is my neighbour?

Now IX tells him this story of the Good Samaritan and with that he gives him the other side of the story and blocks all exits. There's nowhere to run or to hide. It's either obey or disobey. Here's how our Lord starts off the story: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead." Dramatic, yes, common yes even on the road from Joburg to Durban or some other road to that distant and promised land. Attacks by robbers. Stripping, raping, beating, leaving. It's who it is and all in a day's work and happens even to the best of people – as you all know.

Now the Lord IX introduces some more role players: a priests and Levite. These are members of the religious establishment. Very much like that teacher of the law himself. Probably his kind of neighbour: God's people on the ground, church personnel & staff, the ones busy with matters of Justification, holy living, law & heavenly goals: eternal life, bliss

and salvation. The priest is on his way to work. He needs to keep clean and away from defiling himself by touching a dead person. Otherwise he would have become unfit for his task & mission. He goes down the road, sees the victim and passes by: indifferent, merciless and loveless. Then a Levite comes down the road and comes to the crime scene, looks, sees the dying man and passes on. Same procedure. No difference: Indifferent, merciless and loveless. You'd not like him as your neighbour, when you need help now would you? Even though he is not as severely constrained as the priest, because could even touch a corpse without defiling and disqualifying himself from the task in the temple worship. Yet, he follows the example set by the priest. He too hardens his heart and goes by, following the footsteps of the priest. He doesn't stop to help the one fallen under the robbers. Uncritically he sanctions the decision of his superior and doesn't challenge his neglect and oversight. He too goes on and passes by and lets the victim of violence continue to suffer. He and his boss are comrades in crime, they'll both cover for each other, nobody will be able to point fingers. They're ok. They're all in the framework of the law, entirely inside perimeters of the letter of law. It's all strictly legal. No reason for concern. Nobody could expect them to dirty their hands, interrupt their busy schedule and help this complete stranger. Perhaps he was beyond help anyway. So - really! IX is turning things on their head. The good become the bad, the teachers and practitioners of the law become the trespassers of God's ways and commandments – and the villains become the heroes.

Enter the Samaritan – a heathen, a foreigner, not our man, not one of us – not from our part of town, not our neighbour, not our clan/family, friend – Kwerekwere, cockroach. He also goes down the road. He comes to the very same crime scene. He sees the man – and he has compassion. He's got a kind heart, feels for the victim, puts himself in his shoes or better still his sad lot, shoulders his burden, makes his trouble and suffering his very own. He goes to the violated man, binds up his wounds, applying 1st aid as good as he can. He even puts him on his donkey and leads him to safety and to an inn, where he takes care of him like you would expect in some clinic or hospital. The next day he departs, after he pays the innkeeper to continue the good care of the patient and sees to it that he can recuperate in peace and good time. That's why he's called: The good Samaritan! A man, who goes beyond the call of duty. Volunteers his help. Sticks out his neck – even if he's in danger to fall victim to those very same robbers or even though innocent and without

doing any wrong still fall victim to retaliation by the family of the patient, who would look for somebody to blame and accuse – even if falsely. You know, how this goes!

Now all that is way beyond the letter of civil law. You can't enforce that with some police force. There no commandments for this sort of charity, love and mercy in any democracy of our time and world. Love, mercy, compassion that truly extra-ordinary, special. Love summarizes God's divine will. Remember:

- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' & 'Love your neighbour as yourself'

That divine Law, commandment and holy will holds true from the very beginning – from the OT right into our time.

We come to the close of our sermon. In the beginning of our sermon, we once again confessed that we are but poor, miserable sinners. We are the ones, who are half dead and IX is the one, who found us and restored us, forgave us all our sins and is healing all our diseases, hurts and wounds, which we carry due to some infliction by robbers of some sort and sometimes even by our own fault, our own fault, our own most grievous fault. See IX loves us, shows mercy to us, heals us, pays for us, gives us lodging, revives us with his precious means of grace, he feeds us and nurtures us. IX was the one, who was despised, because he ate with sinners, but he in fact was the one, who fulfils the Law, who embodies the Torah and brings God's mercy to his people. As I live in you, you will have life and will do mercy – not motivated by law and definitions, but animated, vibrant and flourishing by IX indwelling love. His Love which prays for the enemies, forgives those, who wrong us and blesses those, who persecute us. Merciful just as the Father in heaven is merciful and lets it rain over good and bad.

See – that's what happens in our church. We are all saved and delivered by IX our Lord. This church is the inn, where he puts us up to heal. Here he takes care of us and revives us to live with him in righteousness and purity all the days of our life: Rich & poor, free and slave, Jews and gentiles. No longer an exclusive clubhouse: "Access reserved!", but rather a hospital, hospice, care- and life-centre: "Free for all!" The doors are wide open. They still bring in others, who have fallen by the wayside. Let them come in. There's lots more space and room – and God has mercy on the all. In IX we are one with the Father, his life is ours and that is the highest good and holds true for ever! Amen.