SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — July 13, 2025

Last week: St. Paul ends Galatians telling us that true freedom comes through serving others — summed up in the commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself.

This week: Jesus stretches our idea of whom our neighbor is. Luke (if the translation was more accurate) makes things simple by using the word "do" four times:

- It all beings with the lawyer asking, What must I *do* to inherit life in God's reign?"
- With prompting from Jesus, the lawyer boils the commandments down to love — love God and love neighbor. To which Jesus responds, "*Do* this and you will live."
- After telling the lawyer the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks him, 'Which of the tree was a neighbor to the man who was robbed?' To which the man says, "The one *doing* mercy to him."
- To which Jesus responds, "Go and *do* likewise."

Doing love. Doing mercy and compassion. Can it can be any simpler than that to understand what saves us for the abundant life of God's reign?

Yet our traditional Lutheran theology has kind of given us an allergy to being saved by something so simple as doing love and mercy. We have tended to call that "works righteousness" — thinking we are being saved by what we do. No, we Lutherans have said we are saved only by faith — meaning our faith in what God has graciously done through Jesus.

This is another area in which I've changed my mind. I no longer think quite in terms of what I was taught. I still believe I'm saved by what God has graciously done through Jesus. But it's not *my* faith in that grace which saves me. No, it's the *faithfulness of Jesus* which saves me. And guess what? That faithfulness of Jesus centered on what he *did*. He showed and taught us how to *do* love and mercy to all of God's children. In a world hostile where law is based on love instead of force, this meant he had to *do* something else: die for us on the cross and be raised again on Easter to extend forgiveness to us. This is what the *faithfulness of Jesus Christ* means. It is everything he *did* and *does* for us in love.

How could we Lutherans have been so off-center on this message of grace. It depends on bad translations of key verses that Luther and subsequent Protestants made on key verses from St. Paul. The following chart shows some of those verses: first the mistranslation in the NRSV in column 1, and the better translation in column 2.

NRSV	Corrected
Rom 3:22: "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ"	God's justice through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ"
Gal 2:16: "justified . . . through faith in Jesus Christ"	"justified . . . through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ"
Gal. 3:22: "what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe"	"what was promised through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ might be given to those who have faith"
Phil. 3:9: "having a righteousness . . . that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith."	"having a justice . . . that comes through the faithfulness of Christ, the justice from God based on his faithfulness."

We are saved by what Jesus did and does for us. Through faith and the Spirit, that faithfulness of Jesus can begin to live in us. We can begin to do what Jesus does.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a great place to start. Who are our neighbors in need of our help? How can we, "Go and do likewise?" Thread-by-Thread Ministry is a great place to start!

I'd like to stretch our thinking about the possibilities with a story similar to the Good Samaritan in our modern context. It is a story told by CNN news correspondent Peter Arnett in the early 2000's about trying to save a Palestinian child gravely hurt by a terrorist bomb. (Pastor tells story.)

Now follow that story with an update on what I shared last week: On June 22, Donna Kashanian, age 64, — who has lived in the United States for 47 years, married a U.S. citizen, Russ Milne and raised their daughter, Kaitlynn — was gardening in the yard of her New Orleans home June 22 when I.C.E. officers handcuffed and took her away. Update: this week her representative in Congress, Steve Scalise (R), presented hundreds of letters from neighbors in support of Donna and she was released by I.C.E. to return home. Advocate! Go and do likewise! Who are our neighbors that need us to advocate for them?