

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

Dr. George O. Wood

“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘What is written in the Law?’ He replied. ‘How do you read it?’ He answered: ‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ In reply Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:25–37, NIV).

My sermon is titled today, “The Most Important Question on Earth.” That question is: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” I realized, after giving this sermon this title, that in my striving for accuracy on this and all sermons, maybe I was a little too dogmatic on this title. Maybe this

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

question is not the most important question. Maybe it's one of the three or four most important questions in life.

Certainly, the question that Jesus asks in Luke 9:20 is an important question: "What or who do you say that I am?" Certainly the question the Philippian jailer asked Paul is important: "What must I do to be saved?" And then there's this question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" asked of Jesus twice by this scribe or religious lawyer, and then later, in Luke 18, by the Rich Young Ruler.

All of these questions—"Who do you say that I am?" "What must I do to be saved?" "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"—all of these are questions of the first rank.

We will look at our text today from four different divisions. We will ask, "Who asked the question?" We will look at the subject, "Why was the question asked?" We will look thirdly at how Jesus asked the question. And fourthly, we will ask, "What was the question?" for, in the course of the story, the question almost gets lost.

I. Who asked the question?

The older translations say "a lawyer" came to Jesus and asked Him. In the newer translations it says "an expert in the law" asked Him. Both translations are right. In the day that Jesus lived, the expert in the law was the lawyer, because society in Israel was founded upon the Torah, not the Constitution. It required experts in the Torah, the Law—the first five books of Moses—to be able to discern and apply the immutable and unchanging Word of God to the changing circumstances of life. So here was a person, a man, who came to Jesus, who was skilled in his field, an expert in the law. Part of that noble profession—which had been vaulted to prominence through the rise of Ezra a half century before—was performing a most noble service in Israel in preserving the written Word of God. By the time of Jesus, however, the scribes, like the

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

Pharisees, had gotten stuck upon the minutiae of the externalities of the Law rather than the heart of the Law which the Law itself was concerned the most with.

To give you a little flavor of the issues that a scribe might wrestle with, I would simply point to an illustration in modern Judaism, because all of modern Judaism is an attempt to take the Torah, the Law, and apply it to today. There are different schools of thought within Judaism that have different ways of doing this. But from the earliest days of oral interpretation of the Talmud to the Law, we find an attempt to adapt the unchanging Word of God to current needs.

I get the Jerusalem Post, which comes to me on a weekly basis. My favorite place in the Jerusalem Post is a little column that is called “Torah Today.” It’s written by a professor of Jewish Thought and Literature from the University in Negev. He does a little thing each week on a different segment of the Old Testament and talks about how the rabbis through the ages have understood it, and then applies it to today. A passage, recently, that he was dealing with is about Job. He says, “Job, a biblical hero facing disaster and death says, ‘Naked came I out of my mother’s womb and naked I shall return thither. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.’” Then, he asks the question, “Is this really what it’s all about—when the Lord gives we say, ‘Blessed be His name,’ and when He takes away we say, ‘Blessed be His name’? But all of us who’ve had the experience of the Lord taking away know it’s not as easy to say, ‘Blessed be the name of the Lord’ when He’s taking away, as when He’s giving. So the modern scribe says, ‘Is this really all there is too it? Is man capable of blessing God equally for the giving and the taking?’ My great teacher (and that’s a part of scribal thinking) offered the following reading of the verse in Job. ‘The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord for the years in between the giving and the taking away.’”

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

I like that. That puts it all together. Life takes on a different meaning, as a blessed gift when viewed from this vantage point. When a scribe gives you a good steak to sink your teeth in, it satisfies. “Blessed be the name of the Lord for the years in between the giving and the taking away.”

This man who stands before Jesus is such a scribe. If you didn’t know it by anything else, you’d know it by what He’s wearing. He’s wearing the robes of his office, colorful robes. He has meticulously placed, in the center of his forehead, a black calfskin leather box (as well as on his wrist). Inside that box, which was called “the phylactery,” were four small scrolls containing key sections of the Torah—Deuteronomy 6, Exodus 13, Deuteronomy 11, and Leviticus 19:18.

Deuteronomy 6 and the heart of the law says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” That was in the box on his head. Anytime you see an orthodox Jew today at the time of prayer, you’ll see the same thing. The phylactery is put on at the time of prayer, on the head and on the wrist. And in there is the *shema*, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God...is one.” And Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

This, then, is the man who stood up to question Jesus. The question arises, did he want an answer or did he want an argument? This brings us to the second consideration,

II. Why did he ask the question?

The text of Luke makes it clear that he asked the question, not because he wanted the answer, but because he wanted the argument. He “stood up to test Jesus.” Many times, our English language does not have the flavor of synonyms that another language has. For example, the English word “love.” We all know that the Greek New Testament has three different words that can be used. The same way for the word “test,” there’s more than one word for test. The word that’s used here is only used three times in the New Testament. It’s used in Luke 4:12 by Jesus, when He’s

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

resisting Satan’s temptation of jumping off the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus says, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” And it’s used here, in Luke 10, and it’s used in 1 Corinthians 10:9 of the children of Israel, “We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.” All three times that word “test” is used, it is used by people who really don’t believe in God and are simply wanting to defeat the purposes or put God to the test to prove that He’s God; when God never has to prove He’s God. Do not put the Lord your God to the test.

The scribe, in fact, had known the answer to his question since his earliest days in school.

Practically before he learned the Hebrew alphabet, he had learned the center of the law—“Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself.” And any schoolboy could answer the question “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” It’s all wrapped up in the Law: Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. It’s fundamental.

This scribe, though, was hoping that Jesus would answer differently perhaps, so he could engage Him in an argument. Maybe the scribe had heard of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, in which Jesus had said, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3); maybe he’d heard Jesus saying, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14); and he was ready to engage Him in dialogue about the merit of the law and the merit of the sacrificial system and the need for the priesthood and all the institutions within Judaism. He was ready for debate.

So this brings us to the third point.

III. How did Jesus answer his question?

He does three things in answering it: The first thing He does is ask for the man’s own opinion.

“You’ve asked *Me* the question. What’s written in your Law? How do you read it?” That, by the way, is an excellent debating device. Somebody throws something at you, and you throw back a

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

question, “What do you think about that?” I’ve found that it’s a very helpful crutch when I’m asked questions that I don’t know the answers to. There are a lot of questions I don’t know the answers to. Theological questions, biblical questions. Sometimes, when I get caught on a personal problem that I don’t have the answer to, I find myself almost instinctively resting my chin on my hand and saying, very seriously and pastorally, “What do you think about that?” Of course, that doesn’t help anybody...or maybe sometimes it does.

But Jesus didn’t do that to stall. He was just putting the ball back in the court of the man who asked it. Sort of like, if you think of a debate as a tennis match, He’s just lobbed it back in his court. Then, when the man says the fundamental answer that every kid would know, Jesus says, “Good point! Profound. You’ve got the answer every six-year-old knows. Good for you! You’ve got the right answer.” And the scribe is feeling like, “Somehow, He got the best of me.” Jesus says, “Do this and you will live.” That’s what the law is all about. If you do it, you’ll live. If you can love the Lord God with all your mind, heart, soul, and strength and all the ramifications of that, and if you love your neighbor as yourself, the whole Old Testament code of morals—those two fundamental points—everything that governs all of human life in any century falls on those two principles. Jesus is saying, “If you can do it, if you can keep it, you’ve got eternal life! Go your way! Go do it and live.”

The scribe had come to trap Jesus and, instead, had wound up being trapped. So the text tells us that he sought to justify himself. I don’t know how many times I’ve read that text, and the word “justify” immediately takes me to the Book of Romans. I said, “He’s now trying to get salvation, he’s trying to justify himself.” That’s not what it means here. It means that the crowd is listening and saying, “Why did that guy who knows everything ask Him such a stupid, elemental question? Everybody knows the answer to that.” Even Jesus knew the answer to that. So he’s

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

seeking to justify himself. He's seeking to save face. So he follows up, "Well then, who is my neighbor? That's a debatable point. What do You say, Jesus?" He knows that Jesus has been eating with sinners and tax collectors and sending His disciples out to Gentiles and places like that. So, "Who is my neighbor? I'll get an argument on this one."

Jesus, instead of answering with an argument, answers him with an immortal story, the story of the Good Samaritan, which is so familiar to us. I always shudder when I take a familiar text, because it's so familiar, maybe we just already know it. But I've found that the Word of God is inexhaustible.

I've been on that road from Jerusalem to Jericho many times. It's still not a safe road. You leave Jerusalem and you drop off into the Judean wilderness. You're going 3,400 feet down in 20 miles. Several years ago, we were in a seven-seat Mercedes taxi on the road through the mountain. This Israeli troop truck came along and passed us and forced us off the road. I thought it was going to kill us. It's still a dangerous road.

Here is a man going down—Jesus doesn't identify him... the nationality of the man, the name of the man, the circumstances, the age, he's just a man—it's really any man. He is any man or any woman mugged by life. Maybe we could say he deserved to be there, because anybody stupid enough to go down that road alone deserves to get mugged. That's often what we say to people when they wind up in a ditch. "If they hadn't been so stupid, they'd never been there in the first place. I told you so!" The only problem with that point of view is that it doesn't help the guy lying there. But that man meets the people in life that you and I meet when we are mugged by life.

There are three kinds of people in life.

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

A. There are the robbers. Their attitude of life is “What’s yours is mine, if I can get it. I live for me. If you’ve got something I want, I’ll get it from you and I’ll use you as long as you create in me enjoyment of whatever kind. When I’m through with you, I’ll throw you away.” There are a lot of people living in that kind of narcissism today. People are disposable: what’s yours is mine if I can get it.

B. Then there are people like the priests and the Levites. Their attitude in life is, “What’s mine is mine and you can’t have it.” A popular song when I was a teenager, “Two Different Worlds.” “And people from my world don’t cross into that world.” The priest and the Levite came along and saw the man half dead. They didn’t know if he was alive or dead, but they had to be cautious because he might be dead. And, as priests and the Levites were sort of assistant priests, they were instructed by the Old Testament—in Leviticus 21:1,11,12—that they were not to touch the dead. If they touched the dead, they were contaminated and ceremonially defiled and unable to engage in the acts of a priest to worship God and lead other people in worship. They were probably on their way to Jerusalem. In those days, priests were divided into twenty-four different groups, and each group served the Lord in the temple of Jerusalem once a week, two times a year. They served a whole week, went home, came back later, and served another week. If they touched a dead person, they were defiled for seven days and couldn’t therefore do what they were supposed to be doing in the temple. So they didn’t know whether the guy was breathing or not, but they better not come near. So they pull away from him and walked to the other side of the road. We look at that and think, “Why in the world did God tell priests not ever to touch the dead?” It’s easy to understand when you realize that, when He gave that Law Israel had just come up out of Egypt and Egypt was a society whose religion centered on death. The pyramids are a testimony to the fact that the vocation of a person’s life was to prepare for death. And the

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

priesthood of Egypt was designed to minister to the dead. And the Lord says, “Not among My people. The focus is not going to be on death. The focus is going to be on life. And I’m not going to allow you to have elaborate funerals attended by priests in long periods of mourning with statues and monuments. Your priests are going to minister to the living.” So that’s why the prohibition.

So what’s happening that day is that the priests and Levites go by and Jesus knows what He’s doing in this story. He’s engaging people in a moral and theological and ethical question. There are two things that appear to be contradictory. There is the ceremonial law, which says, “Don’t touch the dead.” And there is the moral law, which says “Love your neighbor.” And maybe the man isn’t dead and you ought to help him. When those two laws are in conflict, which one do you go with? All of our tough decisions come when two laws are in conflict and we don’t know if this moment is the one God’s calling us to.

The classic example of that is the ethical question of World War II. If you were living in Germany and you were hiding some Jews in the attic and the Nazis appeared at the door and said, “Are you hiding any Jews?” do you say yes, and thereby not break the commandment “Thou shalt not lie.” But if you said yes, you’d break the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” So which commandment should you break? I should not lie or I should not kill? Because, if you told the truth, you know you would forfeit their lives. So which would you choose?

Two things in competition. The ceremonial law—don’t touch the dead—is in conflict with the moral law—Love your neighbor as yourself. The position of the scribes and the Pharisees was plain. The ceremonial law comes first. Jesus’ position was also plain—the moral law comes first. And it is superior to the ceremonial law. In fact, Jesus is saying in His ministry: God is doing away with the ceremonial law, is ending the priesthood, is ending the sacrificial system because

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

He's the great high priest and He's the sacrifice being offered once and for all. All the ceremony of the past is done with, and God's law goes straight to the heart and touches upon our direct relationship with Him and with our neighbor. So Jesus' stand is clear. It's on the internal rather than the external application of the law. His answer had to set a few teeth on edge.

C. The Samaritan—his attitude was the third attitude of life—what is mine is yours, if you need it. He models forever the six attributes of a person who cares. If you want to be a caring person, these six attributes of the Good Samaritan will help.

1. He had x-ray vision. He saw the need. Lots of need. A noncaring person never sees the need, and remains static. But he cared in that he saw.

2. He became emotionally involved. He had compassion upon him. The plight of someone else went right into his feelings and into his heart.

3. He risked. There's a risk to be a Good Samaritan. There have been people who have been killed trying to be Good Samaritans. There's a danger for the Good Samaritan himself because maybe the robbers are still around. Maybe they'll get him. He's by himself too. There's a risk if he helps. There's always a risk if we help. We risk our time. We risk our convenience. We risk our money. We risk.

4. There's practical action of the person who cares. The Good Samaritan poured in wine as an antiseptic and healing balm, and he placed him on his donkey.

5. He focused upon the person. The text says he "took care of him." He just didn't minister to the needs, he ministered to the person.

6. He cared for postemergency follow-up. He gave two denarii to the innkeeper to keep him. And by the way, he had good credit. The innkeeper was willing to keep him on the basis of if he spends more than that, when the man comes back, he will pay him. That, by the way, would not

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

have been lost on Jesus' listeners, who were rabbis in good standing. That here was a Samaritan who had good credit.

Are you interested in knowing what the hotel bill was? I'm interested, because I know what hotel rates are running in Jerusalem today. We know from history, kind of, what the hotel bill was.

There was a traveler in 150 B.C. who was traveling in Italy, who paid one-sixteenth of a denarii for room and board. That appeared to be a standard rate. Since there wasn't any inflation in those decades, it's probable that one denarius gave this man about one month's lodging in the inn by the side of the road.

Where is the need?

And is there so much need around us that we're pulverized into doing nothing? I think, probably, living in our culture it's difficult for us to be a Good Samaritan, because the need about us is so overwhelming. It's difficult to know at times where to even plug in. We have to be careful lest we give up hope and not plug into anything because there's simply too much to do.

A recent example, where many of you have been involved really reaching out to people that are wounded by the side of the road, is our attempt this summer to have the first Christian camp ever for kids that are abused. Probably, the first Christian camp ever in the nation, as far as we can tell. We call it the Royal Family Kids Camp. We had 37 kids in that camp for a week. In actual fact, there were 11,549 mandated cases of child abuse reported in Orange County in the last year. We had 37 out of 11,549. Out of those 11,549, 58 percent are kids under the age of five and 38 percent are under the age of two. There was a 47 percent increase in child abuse last year compared to the previous year and a 9 percent decrease in foster parent applications to take children in. Mandated cases of child abuse are reports that must be turned in by responsible adults—teachers, counselors, even pastors. I'm allowed to keep everything confidential you tell

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

me as a pastor. I can take the witness and in the court of law refuse to divulge information on the grounds of pastoral confidentiality. But one area the state of California forbids me to do that is if you come in and say, “I’ve abused my child and God’s dealing with me about that. I have physically abused them or sexually abused them.” I am required to turn you in to protect the child and to protect you. Mandated reported cases.

The people who worked with these 37 kids came back, I would say, greatly exhilarated and greatly burdened. Exhilarated at the opportunity. Burdened by the challenge. They were saying, “Out of the great need, we only had 37, and we only had them one week out of fifty-two. What could we ever do with so few and so little time?” I believe it was the Lord who brought across my desk this story that had been an encouragement and will be an encouragement to all of us. It’s a story about an old man who was walking along the beach at dawn. He noticed a young man ahead of him, picking up starfish and flinging them back into the ocean and the surf. The old man caught up with the youth and said, “What are you doing?” The young man’s answer was that the starfish were stranded and would die if left in the morning sun. They needed to be returned to the ocean. The old man said, “But this beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish. How can your effort make any difference?” The young man picked up a starfish and held it in his hand and with a flick of his wrist he tossed it into the ocean. He said these immortal words, “It makes a difference to this one.”

What can you do that will make any difference? It makes a difference to this one. I’ve been the pastor of this church for almost fifteen years. The only church I’ve ever pastored, and Lord willing, as far as I’m concerned, the only church I will ever pastor. I’m sort of in love with you all. Some of you, anyway! I’ve watched trends and fads come and go in these last fifteen years. In fact, all my life I’ve spent in church, I’ve seen more fads come and go than some people

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

remember. I've found that every time a fad comes along, it has a great element of truth to it.

Probably, it's such a rage and hit in the body of Christ because it's an emphasis that's been neglected. Ultimately, the body must come back to balance if it's to be healthy.

I'm going to say a couple things here that may be misunderstood. Let me put them in context. I see a great desire in the body of Christ today to center on worship. I think that's fabulous. I think that's of God, I think that's of the Holy Spirit. But I think that along with that good and proper desire to focus on worship, there's also a danger. A danger to so center on worship that we go to that side of the boat and the boat tips over.

The balance to worship is work. If our goal is simply to come and worship and feel good and to sing a song over enough times that we're in a semi-catatonic state and we call that spiritual elevation and we say, "I was at worship and I got so strong into worship," if all we do is worship and walk away and say, "That's it, it's all in worship," we have left something vital out of the picture. Worship empowers us for work. If we try to be all work, we're going to burn out in Christian service, because we need the elevating power of being impressed with the magnitude and the glory and the peace of God. That's what worship does to us. I need to be in tune.

Worship tunes me in to God. But if all I do is worship and I become unavailable to the work of the Lord and I simply want to feel good and judge my service to God as to whether or not I've been to service and feel good...there is something more important than me feeling good. I want, first of all, for God to feel good and I want somebody else to feel good because I've been in this world.

I must work the works of Him who has sent me, while it is yet day. And my balance in Christian life must come as I center upon Him and center, also, upon His work. Worship and work. The Samaritan is one who gives himself to the work of the Lord.

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

We've almost lost sight of the question.

IV. What was the question?

A commentator of an earlier generation said, “Our text begins in a theological controversy and ends in a description of first aid at the roadside. It arises in a question of eternal life and works out to payment for room and board at a hotel.” That’s kind of where this story goes. The question centered upon “What must I do”? And Jesus put it to the scribe using the parameters the scribe had decided to use with Jesus; He says, “If you’re going to ask the question that way, then here’s the answer, this is what you must do. Keep the law completely. Love God. Love your neighbor. Keep it completely and you’ll have eternal life.”

But the real answer to the man’s question is found in John 3:16, when Jesus is allowed to shape the question: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes [not “does”] in Him [it’s a relationship, not a work] shall not perish but have eternal life.” I want eternal life. And by the way, I want the quantity of life but I also want quality. I will not be satisfied with eternal life if it’s the quality that I live. I live in a good quality, but I have a lot of frustrations. I don’t want any of those eternally. Have eternal life.

In closing, let me tell you how the early Church Fathers understood this story. They were great at looking at the Scripture trying to find, in every nook and cranny, some meaning in the text—we would say “allegorically.” Both their interpretations were highly subjective and that method of interpreting Scripture is not used today because it is so extremely subjective. But in the second, third, and fourth centuries, many of the great leading fathers of the church, the theologians and pastors in the great cities, used this understanding of the text. There was a man on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem is the city of God. Jericho was the city of man. The man is Adam. The man was on his way from man’s city to God’s city and fell, mortally wounded, by

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

the robber, Satan, and his henchmen, who wounded him and robbed him of life, by the side of the road, so that he was half-dead. He was no longer fully alive to God nor was he completely out of existence. He's lying on the side of the road. The man is not only Adam, it's every half-dead man or woman who is wounded by the side of the road and unable to live fully. Physically alive but spiritually dead. The priest and the Levite come by—religion comes by, the Law comes by, the prophets come by—and all they can do is pass by, unable to help. They are unable to help. Religion is unable to save. So that finally Jesus Himself, the Good Samaritan, comes. And Jesus is either going from the city of God to the city of man—His incarnation—He's coming from God to us and meets us going that direction; or He is going from the city of man back up, ascending to the city of God, and is getting ready to take us with Him. Whichever way He is going, He meets us at the side of the road. He comes to us and pours in His presence, His oil and His wine, sets us on a beast of burden, His cross, and carries us to the inn, where He provides for our complete recovery. The last point which the Church Fathers made was that the innkeeper is the church, because when Jesus saves the man or the woman by the side of the road, He brings them in His wholeness and provides everything that the man needs to get well. But He knows that it takes time for the man to become whole and recover, so He entrusts the man He saved and the woman He saved to the care of His Church.

I've never found a better description of the purpose of the Church than that little story. It is the Church's mission to receive those who Jesus has rescued at the roadside of life. To nurture and care and provide for them until He comes back.

Whom do you identify most with in this story? Think about that for a moment. What questions really matter to you?

Closing Prayer

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ON EARTH

Luke 10:25–37

Father, we thank You for these moments in Your Word. Some of us today identify most with the person that is wounded. For we are here and we have been wounded and we are half-dead and half-alive. We need Your presence, Lord, to come to us today and to help us. Maybe some of us identify with people who know there's a problem but don't do anything about it. People who are hung up on talk. Maybe that's what You've been saying to us today, Lord. You've been telling us, "You've talked long enough. Now it's time to do something." Lord, we all want to identify with You. We want to take time to care, to love. We take time, Lord, to thank You that You have told us to go do this and live, but through grace, we have been told to live and then do this. For if we had to do something in order to live, we'd never be perfect. But You've set us free to give and then go do Your works. We pray, Lord, for this church. All of us here today love this body and the work that You've given us to do in this community. Help us to be a good inn, Lord. A good inn by the side of the road. Help this church to be a family that is known for its care and its love. Its love for everybody, including the lost, the least, the lonely, the last, the hurting, the neglected, the abused. Help us, Lord, to be the kind of people, the kind of place in which people recover and get back on their feet and serve You with all of their heart, until You come. Thank You for leaving Your Church the Holy Spirit and the written Word, the power of the gospel, which is sufficient to take care of every man and woman who comes in need of recovery in Your presence. Help us, Lord, to love You, to love our neighbor, to be worshippers and workers. We ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.