



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 5

July 13, 2025

The Two Ways

Luke 10:25–37

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”²⁷ And he answered, “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.”

²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Most people choose one of two ways by which to be saved. They either want to do good works and not believe, or they want to believe and not do good works. Those who want to do good works but not believe feel that our day is one of great enlightenment, that people have finally come to the realization that the articles of the Christian faith are opposed to the laws of reason. In their view, an enlightened person cannot accept the Christian faith. Rather, they believe that it doesn't matter what sort of faith or religion you have, because in eternity – if there is one – you're going to stand on the quality of your own character, good or bad. Shockingly, many who call themselves Christians would go along with that.

There are plenty of others within the Christian camp who think that, because they're baptized, they don't need to be bothered with good works. "If good works don't save me, why should I do them?"

Now, as different as these two groups may seem, they really walk the same path of self-deception. We mustn't think for a moment that the first group really has good works



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 5

July 13, 2025

without faith, or that the second group really has faith without good works. Neither group really has either one!

In the first place, Scripture clearly says; "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). So all the works of an unbeliever, however glorious they may seem, are nothing but sin in the eyes of God. In the second place, Scripture says "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (Jam. 2:17). So a faith without works is useless, a mere shadow that can't save anyone.

You see, faith isn't what a lot of people think it is: some sort of magical power you muster up within yourself. "If I believe strongly enough, I can do *anything!*" They forget to consider what their faith is based on, which greatly influences what a person is actually attempting to do according to their faith." First of all, faith is not a power unto itself. For many people, their faith is really in themselves. That's not going to accomplish much. True faith is focused on God. It is a mysterious gift of the Holy Spirit. It's a heavenly light and a divine power that makes the spirit come to life, which then clings to salvation in Christ, which in turn becomes a spring of love and good works.

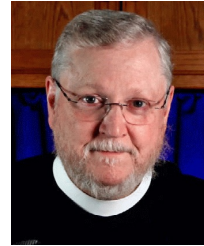
Luther writes in his Lectures on Genesis: "Faith is a vigorous and powerful thing; it is not idle speculation, nor does it float on the heart like a goose on the water. But, just as water that has been heated, even though it remains water, is no longer cold but is hot and an altogether different water, so faith, the work of the Holy Spirit, fashions a different mind and a different attitude, and makes an altogether new human being."

We see this in today's Gospel. A lawyer asks Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Since the man's heart is bent on the law, Jesus directs him to the law, asking, "What is written in the law?" "How do you read it?" And the lawyer answers: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus responds: "You have answered correctly, do this and you will live."

It's as though Christ were telling him, "Go ahead. Just try it." "Try once to love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself. Go ahead. But you will soon see the truth and your courage will melt away."

This also explains why He then told the story of the Good Samaritan. He wanted to teach this lawyer that up to this point he had never actually loved his neighbor – that as a poor sinner, as a transgressor of God's commands, he first had to believe in *Him* – that is Christ – and thereby receive a new heart. Only then would he truly be able to love his neighbor. Through the example of the Good Samaritan, Christ wanted to show that true love does not dwell in the heart of natural man, and that there's no such thing as true *love* without true *faith*.

Now, you may know that Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies; among the Jews there was a deep seated hatred and great contempt for the Samaritans. If you wanted to really insult someone, you'd call him a Samaritan. They did this to Jesus and His followers



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 5

July 13, 2025

on more than one occasion.

So, to make His point especially clear, Jesus tells a story about a man beaten up and left for dead. Both a priest and a Levite (fine, up-standing men in Jewish society) saw the man lying there but did nothing to help him. They both knew the law very well, yet they had no love for this man lying in misery. They saw him, beaten and bleeding, but they had no compassion.

Who, then, is the unlikely hero of the story? A Samaritan! The lowest of the low in Jewish culture. This “lowlife” is the one who has compassion. The man in need was a Jew, an enemy, yet the Samaritan’s heart was deeply moved. So he binds his wounds and takes him to the nearest inn. Here he takes the responsibility of caring for the man. And the next day, he gives the innkeeper several pieces of gold and says: "Take care of him and whatever more you spend, I will repay when I come back. "

Here is an example of what true love toward a neighbor looks like. It doesn’t ask whom it should help; it helps anyone, even an enemy when he’s in need. And it doesn’t only help him, it’s also moved with pity. True love doesn’t ask, “What’s in it for me?” It acts, even when the one helped isn’t aware of who’s helping, even when the one helped will give nothing but ingratitude in return. Nor does true love give only what’s left over; it denies itself to help another who needs it more. True love does not grow weary. As long as it sees a need it extends an open hand.

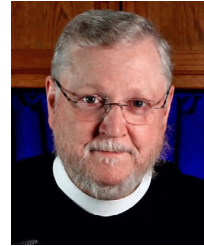
Now, show me the person who can say that by nature such a love exists in his heart? Unbelievers brag that they are more loving than Christians; I’m sure they think they are, but unbelievers do not generally love people as they love themselves. Unbelievers generally do their good deeds in front of an audience, so that they may be seen doing them; such actions are ruled by self-interest. Unbelievers go through life more like the priest and the Levite, passing by their neighbor, often without much notice. Their love is a mere imitation, for where there is no true faith there can be no true love. Someone might object: “I know plenty of Christians who do the same thing!” Yes, because Christians, being sinful human beings, often behave like unbelievers.

Now consider:

Just as it is impossible for an unbeliever truly to love his neighbor, so it is impossible for a believer *not* to love his neighbor. A believing heart, moved by the Spirit of God within it, is warmed and softened by the fire of God’s love.

If faith were nothing more than a cognitive process; if it were nothing more than the intellectual persuasion that Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world; if it were nothing more than a self-generated thought that says, "I believe," then indeed faith would not have the power to transform human beings.

But true faith is a living trust in Christ and His grace which moves us to place in Him the confidence of our whole heart; it’s the living conviction that the Gospel of Christ is God’s voice, God’s Word, God’s promise, and that we can rely on it, seizing the Word of



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 5

July 13, 2025

Grace as our only anchor of hope, clinging to it as to the gracious outstretched hand of God Himself. True faith is the bold assurance that what Christ did and suffered for all happened also for my benefit, that I am so sure of the forgiveness of sins and salvation that I'm prepared every moment to die on account of it.

Is it possible, do you think, that such a living persuasion of the inexpressible love of God in Christ Jesus can come into a person's heart without that heart being moved by the love that has taken up residence in it? Is it possible that a person can obtain such a living trust in God's Word of Grace, such a daring hope in God's Word of promise, such a certainty of salvation without having a holy desire to do for others as God has done for us?

That a living, true faith resides in a person can easily be seen from the prophets and apostles. Their stories are recorded throughout Scripture and throughout the history of the Church. As soon as they began to believe from the heart that they had found grace with God, they began to consecrate their whole lives to their fellow redeemed; more and more, their lives were filled with love to God and their neighbor. They would rather suffer a martyr's death than to silence the gospel they preached so that others would come to know Christ and be saved.

Dear friends, if we examine ourselves in this regard, what do we find? Do you go through life as a good Samaritan? Or do you, like the priest and the Levite, pass by on the other side? If you find yourself without true love, then it's time for you to repent. Maybe you have to say to yourself, "I'm not only the priest and the Levite; I'm the guy who beat him up in the first place!" Repent, beloved; turn to Jesus the Crucified, so that He can receive you by His grace into His kingdom, and plant that love into your heart which flows from His wounds to all sinners.

Now, I realize that no one here attains to complete love. In this world, everything, even love, remains imperfect. So don't look for comfort in your own imperfect love; look for it in Christ's complete love, making sure that your salvation rests entirely on Him. The more you consider His love and immerse yourself in it, the more your own love will grow, until it reaches completion when you arrive in His presence and see God's everlasting love face to face. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen