

The Mercy We Inherit and Give

*A devotion for Trinity XIII, 30 August 2026,
Morning Prayer*

*Psalm 74; Galatians 3.16–22; Saint Luke 10.23–37
The Litany, BCP, pp. 54–49.*

The Question of an Inheritance

Beloved in Christ, the lawyer asks Jesus a strange question: *Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* But an inheritance is not a wage. We do not earn it by completing a task. We receive it because we belong to the heir.

That is the thread binding together the Psalm, the Collect, the Epistle, and the Gospel. Eternal life is God's promise, given to us in Christ; and the mercy we show our neighbour is not the price of that promise, but the faithful service which God's gift creates in us.

Remember Thy Covenant

Psalm 74 begins in desolation. The sanctuary has been violated, the enemy seems to have carried the day, and the people cannot repair what has been broken. So they plead: *O think upon thy congregation; look upon the covenant; forget not the congregation of the poor for ever.*

The Psalm rests its hope not upon the people's achievement, but upon God's remembrance. They belong to him. His covenant is their plea.

Our Collect speaks the same language. True and laudable service comes from God's gift alone. We ask to serve him faithfully and attain his heavenly promises—and ask it all *through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord*. The Collect puts gift before service, grace before obedience, and Christ before our deserving.

The Promise and the Law

Saint Paul says the same in Galatians. The promise was made to Abraham and to his Seed; and that Seed is Christ. The law came later. It can reveal sin and show us the good; but it cannot give life or cancel the promise.

The law is not a ladder by which we climb into God's favour. It brings us to the place where we must receive what God has promised in Christ. Our works cannot purchase eternal life; yet grace does not leave us unchanged. The God who freely gives the inheritance also gives the faithful service named in the Collect.

Who Became a Neighbour?

The lawyer already knows the commandments: love God wholly, and love your neighbour as yourself. His difficulty is not lack of information. Saint Luke says that he is *willing to justify himself*. He wants a boundary: who counts as my neighbour—and whom may I safely pass by?

Jesus gives him no boundary. He gives him a wounded man, a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. Then he changes the question: not “Who qualifies as my neighbour?” but “Which man became a neighbour?” The Samaritan sees, has compassion, draws near, binds the wounds, bears the cost, and promises to return.

The ancient Church also heard in this Samaritan a picture of Christ. We are the wounded traveller whom he finds. He comes where we are, binds what sin has torn, bears the cost, and promises to come again. We can become neighbours because he has first become neighbour to us.

The Litany on the Road

Today the Litany makes this practical. It is almost the Good Samaritan translated into common prayer. It sets before us those in danger, necessity, and tribulation; travellers; the sick and the young; prisoners and captives; fatherless children and widows; all who are desolate and oppressed. It even places our enemies within the reach of mercy.

Litanies have often been prayed in procession. The congregation walked together behind the Cross, carrying before God the needs of the Church, the community, the fields, and the whole creation. Their repeated answer—*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord*—put one prayer into many mouths and one steady rhythm beneath many different burdens.

Such processions made a spiritual truth visible: the Church does not travel alone. The strong walk beside the weak; the hopeful lend their voices to those who can scarcely pray; and the whole congregation learns to carry before God needs which no single person could bear. The Litany strengthens a congregation because it teaches us to depend upon God together.

Although formed for common prayer, the Litany is also suitable for private devotion. When trouble leaves us unable to find words, its petitions lend us words. When our own problem fills the whole horizon, the Litany gently widens our prayer to include others who suffer. Its repeated cries—*Good Lord, deliver us* and *We beseech thee to hear us*—teach the anxious heart to lean upon Christ. The Litany does not pretend that our problems are small; it reminds us that we do not bear them alone.

And whether prayed in church, in procession, or quietly at home, the Litany will not let us pass by on the other side. We do not pray as rescuers who have no wounds of our own. We pray as people who have received mercy and therefore ask mercy for all.

So let the Litany continue after its last response. Let the prayer shape the next person we notice, the next burden we help to carry, and the next cost we willingly bear. The Psalm teaches us to plead the covenant. The Epistle teaches us to trust the promise. The Gospel teaches us what the promised life looks like when it takes flesh in a human deed.

Almighty and merciful God, faithful service is thy gift. Give us that gift today: not that we may justify ourselves, but because we are justified in Christ; not that we may earn thy promise, but because in Christ we have received it; and not that we may merely name our neighbour, but that, by thy grace, we may become one. Amen.