

SERMON AT TRINITY UMC, WILMETTE, ILLINOIS

## “THE FOUR ESSENTIALS AT TRINITY CHURCH”

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**TEXT:** Luke 10:25-28

**BY:** Pastor Kirk Reed

“Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 10:25). It’s not a shallow question. It’s not like asking about the traffic or the price of orange juice. This expert in the law, the law of Moses, is asking a whopper of a question. Some would say it is the ultimate question.

Why is he asking? Is the lawyer truly searching for eternal life? Or is he an adversary, hoping to embarrass Jesus? We don’t know. We do know that Jesus turns the question around, as if to say: “You are a religious professional. Can you tell me? What does the Bible say?” The lawyer gives a clear answer: “You shall love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). “You have answered well,” says Jesus, “but if you are searching for eternal life, you must do what you have spoken.”

What about us today? If we are paying attention, we can discover the doorway into life, eternal life, which is more than long-lasting life. Life that goes on forever may or may not be desirable. What if I have an old car, a rust bucket of a car that keeps sputtering along forever? What if I have a marriage in which my spouse and I argue every day forever? Do you see the difference between everlasting life and what the Bible calls eternal life? Eternal life is like a car that always feels brand-new. It’s like a great marriage that becomes better through the years. Is that possible? Of course it is, says Jesus to the lawyer, provided that we do what the Bible says (Luke 10:28).

“Yes, but how?” we ask. Here at Trinity Church we believe that there are four essentials. The first essential is **faith**. Faith means loving God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. Or to put it another way, faith happens when we fall in love with God. I began to love God as a teenager. Earlier in my life, I was like the little boy who wrote a thank you note to his grandmother. “Dear Grandma, Thank you for the Christmas present you sent me. I always did like pincushions, but not very much.” That was how I felt about God as a young child: “I liked God, but not very much.” And then it happened. Through the mystery of grace I turned my eyes upon Jesus and looked full in his wonderful face. I discovered – to my amazement – that I could truly love God. That’s what we mean by faith, the first essential.

The second essential is **compassion**. Compassion is loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, caring enough to enter their joy and their pain. We are living at a time of global emergency, when the gap between rich and poor is growing. This feeds into a vicious cycle of violence. Do we care enough to do something for those who are disadvantaged? The key word is care. A 17-

year-old girl was sent to the store for a loaf of bread. It took her an hour to get home. “Where have you been?” her mother demanded to know. “I met a friend in the parking lot of the grocery store.” “But you’ve been gone an hour.” “I know. My friend had just hit a lamp post and wrecked her father’s car.” “And you stopped to help her get home?” “No, I stopped to help her cry.” That’s compassion. It’s a gift from God, essential for us, if we want to inherit eternal life. It means entering the joy and the pain of others.

The third essential is **community**. Faith can grow if we have a community of faith. Compassion can grow if we have a community of compassion. A few years ago I went to a conference where all of us were given a packet of seeds. We were encouraged to plant them as a symbol of our own spiritual growth. I brought my seeds home, set them down with my papers from the conference, and forgot about them. As you can imagine, they never grew. What they needed was good soil. There is good soil available for us, so that our love for God and our love for people will not be like those seeds on my shelf. Community is the good soil.

The fourth essential, we believe, is openness, a spirit of **welcoming**. Some communities are closed. They give a clear message: “No outsiders please. No people different from us.” Think about the Chicago Botanic Garden, developed by one of our church members, Francis de Vos. In the gardens there are thousands of varieties of flowers and plants and trees. What if the original planning team had said: “We want to limit our plant selection; we want all our plants to be the same”? It would have been a disaster. Why? A spectacular garden needs spectacular variety. The same is true in churches. A great church welcomes every kind of human beauty.

It was a profound question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” As we study God’s word, we see four essentials: faith and compassion in a welcoming community. Faith is falling in love with God. Compassion is loving people enough to enter their joy and their pain. Community is the soil without which nothing grows. Welcoming is the secret of good soil. “Then Jesus said to the lawyer: ‘Do this, and you will live.’”