

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 14:1-11

October 4, 2020

Jesus is an invited dinner guest. Yet the Pharisees watch Jesus closely. They seek ways to find guilt in Jesus. And as they watch intently, a sick man enters the room. Knowing the desire of the Pharisees, Jesus puts the question to them, saying, ***“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”***

The Pharisees are experts in the Law and the Old Testament Scriptures, they know the answer to the question Jesus poses, yet they remain quiet, motionless with eyes fixed on Jesus. Guests attending the meal look on and wonder what will happen; if Jesus heals the man, does He violate and break the Sabbath law?

If Jesus healed the man, the Pharisees would clamor that Jesus does not observe, He does not keep, or He does not honor the Sabbath day. If Jesus sends the man with dropsy on his way without healing him, then Jesus is unmerciful. So, which is it? In the deafening silence of the Pharisees, Jesus heals the man and lets him go his way.

So again, a second time, Jesus asks a question of the Pharisees: ***“Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?”*** And again, there was no answer. But, this time, they do not answer because Jesus is following their own rabbinic reasoning that the needs of man exceed the demands of the Sabbath law. Of course, they would save the donkey or an ox that falls into the pit, they would gather family, neighbors, and other animals to assist in digging and towing these animals from their fate of death. The life of these animals would have an impact on their livelihood, their wellbeing, their lives.

However, the pit is a place of death, not just for the animal, but also for man in both a literal and spiritual sense. Throughout Scripture, the pit embraces the image of evil, of Sheol, and mortality. To understand the pit rightly is to understand where man is located apart from God. In fact, some translations put Jesus' question to the Pharisees this way, ***“Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” (ESV)*** Which of you having flesh of your flesh fall would not do all you can to rescue them?

Luther writes, *“Love should be the interpretation of all laws.”* (AE 79, p. 155) This doesn't sound like the stoic nature of a good German, does it? But Luther is correct when he directs us to the summary of the commandments; to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. It is because we fail to love that we need rescuing from the pit that we find ourselves in.

If you have been following along the past few weeks, there is a progression in the Gospel readings, beginning with the Good Samaritan who comes to the man's aid beaten and left for dead in the ditch. Have you been beaten? Do you possess not only visible scars but scars of the heart? Then you are in this pit. Have you been ravaged by a disease like that of the lepers - a contagion of both body and soul? Then you are in this pit. Do you spend countless nights anxiously toiling over the needs of tomorrow - what you will put on and what you will eat? Then you are in this pit. Have you, like the widow of Nain last week, lost your only hope in this life? Then you are in this pit.

Pride says, *"But I can climb out of this pit, I can get myself up the side of this cliff and out of this crater just as easily as I fell into it."* Pride blinds the heart, and where the heart leads, the body follows. The Pharisees were led to seek glory in earthly honor to place their needs before their neighbor, and for this, Jesus says, ***"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."***

Are you humble? Do you walk as the Epistle says, ***"with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love?"*** (ESV) Or are you more of a run to the front of the room, seek the best seat, avoid the needs of your neighbor, defend your position no-matter-the-cost kind of person?

Jesus doesn't need to stretch far for the illustration of the parable He provides today; it was a narration in real-time of what the Pharisees were doing among one another at the meal they were having. It was also a summary and declaration for the purpose Jesus was sent from the Father in heaven to us on earth.

Humbling Himself, Jesus descends from the right hand of the Father, being made man. He took your frail and failing flesh into His birth and in His death, high and lifted up on the cross, Jesus lowers Himself into the pit of Sheol, the grave of humanity - so that through the waters of Holy Baptism you also would arise to new life in His resurrection.

Holy Baptism is Christian humility - the recognition one does not possess the power to rescue oneself from troubles and calamities of life. Our Baptismal life provides a pattern of confessing one's sin, drowning the old Adam and Christ Jesus raising you, and restoring you to forgiveness and new life in Him. This life leads you to join your fellow Christians, crying out with the Psalmist as we chanted before the Gospel, ***"I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy."*** (Psalm 116:1) The Lord has heard your voice and now gives you His mercy, His forgiveness, and life eternal. Jesus invites you to Himself, out of His great love, He invites you to the Wedding Feast that has no end by saying, ***"Friend, go up higher."***

It is for the depths of life, this Sabbath was made, it was made for man, it was made for you. Rejoice with me today, because even in these gray and latter days, Jesus hears your pleas for help, He attends to your needs of body and soul, and rescues you from your pits of despair. +INJ+

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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