

# Second Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 14:15-24

June 13, 2021

Beloved brothers and sisters, it was in the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian that a great persecution of Christians arose in the Roman Empire. But what caused it? Listen carefully to this account of ~~the~~ church life at that time, in the year of our Lord 303: “One could see the rulers in every church accorded the greatest favor by all officers and governors. But how can any one describe those vast assemblies, and the multitude that crowded together in every city...?” [Eusebius: *Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*]. Success. Esteem. *Influence. Growing churches.*

But when on account of the abundant freedom, we fell into laxity and sloth, and envied and reviled each other, and were almost, as it were, taking up arms against one another, rulers assailing rulers with words like spears, and people forming parties against people, and monstrous hypocrisy and dissimulation rising to the greatest height of wickedness, the divine judgment with forbearance, as is its pleasure, while the multitudes yet continued to assemble, gently and moderately harassed the episcopacy.

These Christians used their freedom for gluttony and leisure, and then turned on each other. They hurled words at each other, and formed rival factions. *[Insert section on pastors here for Winkel]* This, according to Eusebius, was the cause of the church persecution. Thus “**The Lord in his wrath darkened the daughter of Zion**” [Lam. 2:1].

Truly in our day the world has gone mad. Our culture no longer can see the difference between boys and girls, the new racists stir up strife from the boardroom to the classroom, the government spies and lies. But what is the cause of it? If Eusebius could hear our whispers and furtive texts, what would he say of us?

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.” Do those words from today’s Epistle describe us?

Notice how that word *brothers* rings out through the whole Epistle:

Do not be surprised, *brothers*.... We love the *brothers*.... Everyone who hates his *brother* is a murderer....

We ought to lay down our lives for the *brothers*.... If anyone ... sees his *brother* in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

The term *brothers* here has a generic usage of *siblings, brothers and sisters*. This is how we are to regard each other. God's Word tells us, **"Both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren"** [Heb. 2:11]. **"Both He who sanctifies [Christ sanctifies us, that is, makes us holy] and those who are being sanctified [that's us, the means of grace are sanctifying us, making us holy] are all of one [we all have one common father, Adam], for which reason He [Christ] is not ashamed to call them brethren."** Because we are Christians—because God is *Our Father*, as we say in the prayer—therefore we are always Christians together.

"Yes," you say, "but I am treated very badly; it is hard to love people who want me gone." Have you not heard the words of Jesus, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you"? Listen to how that great Reformer of the Church, Martin Luther, describes love for our brothers and sisters: "[It] receives nothing from him but gives to him, forgives him, and does all kinds of good for him. This love does not cease if those for whom we do good do not love us in return" [AE 78:68].

Sure, a little bit of patience with others, a little bit of suffering – that's to be expected. But how much do I really have to take? How long do I put up with these loathsome stinkers who never seem to change?

The example St. John gives us is Jesus Himself. **"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us."** That is the Gospel. Notice the language of substitution and exchange. Jesus is our substitute. He

exchanges His death for our life. **“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.” “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”**

[Rom. 5:8].

What then is the reason why you don't forgive? Why do you want justice, someone to pay, to get what's coming to them? Is it not because you don't really believe the Gospel yourself? **“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** There are people in your life who are still sinners. What of it? Forgive. Make no more excuses.

“But I cannot do that,” you say, “for he hasn't apologized.” Well, then what are you waiting for? Go do what the Lord Jesus says: **“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.”** That's from Mt. 18, which is often cited as a legal regulation for the steps taken towards excommunication. It can be used that way, but this is not some matter of jurisprudence, as though as long as we follow due process we will have satisfied the regulations. The goal is always forgiveness.

We have enough trouble from the world. **“Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.”** We can expect that from the world. But among the brothers and sisters, things are to be different. **“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”**

If the world lasts long enough, someone will write the history of this time. Will another Eusebius speak similarly about us?

But when on account of [their] abundant freedom, [they] fell into laxity and sloth, and envied and reviled each other, and were almost, as it were, taking up arms against one another ... people forming parties against people, and monstrous hypocrisy and dissimulation rising to the greatest height of wickedness.

For those who have eyes to see, the great judgment is at the door. The fire is being kindled. There is no refuge to be sought in elections or SCOTUS decisions. These are but symptoms of the great unraveling.

**“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.”** Repent, and flee for refuge to this Jesus who laid down His life for us. Then come, brothers and sisters, and abide in love toward one another. +INJ+