

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

TEXT: SAINT LUKE 14: 15 – 24

The whole season of Trinity is about seeing and entering into the kingdom of God, something that is now a possibility because of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Like Saint Peter's first sermon on the Day of Pentecost – after it, the people asked, What shall we do? And he replied, Repent and be baptized and believe in the Son of God who has opened up to us a new and living way. [Acts 2]

Our Epistle and Gospel for today are both invitations to love, that is to see and enter the kingdom of God.

They are together two sides of the same coin – the commandment to love God is like the commandment to love our neighbor: The Epistle is an invitation to love our neighbor; the Gospel is an invitation to love God. If we do not heed either of these invitations, we are rejecting both.

Well we are all here today for Holy Communion, so we have heeded the invitation of God to come to the banquet. And if we think about it, as we all sit here today, as we look around at each other, we know that we have love for one another here, we feel it in our hearts – so we have heeded the invitation to love our neighbor.

All that is well and good. So why would we pray in the collect for today that God would give us “a perpetual fear and love” of Him? This collect is from the 5th and 6th century and has been put before us to go along with the Epistle and Gospel readings chosen at the same time. It

speaks twice of “fear and love” of God – that might seem a strange combination. But the prayer and the Epistle and Gospel are here at the beginning of Trinity season, year after year, to warn us of a danger of complacency and to pray for God to spur us on.

There is a spiritual danger for us, who have come to know and trust in the self-offering of Jesus Christ, who rest in the knowledge that we are justified before God the Holy Trinity, to sit back a bit and to see our outward engagement in the life of the church, and in sharing the Gospel of love with the world through deed and word, as a kind of icing on the cake, as something we can do in our spare time, after we have attended to all the necessities of life.

Let us as a church consider the four things that the Bible says the early converts to Christ “devoted themselves to” – the Apostles’ teaching (that is the New Testament, and how it leads us to understand the Old Testament), Christian fellowship, the Breaking of the Bread (that is Holy Communion), and the prayers (Acts 2:42). These things bring us closer to God and neighbor, and there is a fruitfulness that comes about from this union – growth in love, spiritual maturity, and more children born into the kingdom of God.

We can ask ourselves today how are we now devoting ourselves to these things here at Saint Michael the Archangel, and how we could better devote ourselves to them?

In the Gospel for today (Luke 14:16-24), Jesus tells a parable about a certain man who invited many to a great supper, and many refused for one reason or another to come. When we read the Gospel, we might think first, well, how crazy is that – that people could possibly say no to God’s invitation? We have heeded the invitation so we need not worry.

But is not it true that the invitation of God to His banquet is something we both heed and do not heed. God says in Scripture, “Seek my face” – and can we really respond – “Your face, Lord, will I seek, with all my heart?” (Psalm 27:9) Those four things I mentioned are the ways to draw near. How much have we really devote ourselves to the teaching of the Bible – these love letters from our beloved? How much have we really devote ourselves to fellowship with one another in the church – with all our brokenness and sharp edges? How much is Holy Communion, the partaking in the very life of God, the center from which all else in our lives flows? How much time daily do we give to prayer and to coming to a state of soul where we are praying at all times (Eph. 6:18; 1Thess 5: 16-18)?

Do you see that we do heed the invitation, but that we hesitate also? We see it surely in our own souls – when we ask the questions about our spiritual disciplines around study of the Bible and prayer! There is this inner resistance still to loving God. And if we look at how much we have devoted ourselves to loving our neighbor in need, and to true fellowship with one another, we might ask how much we have heeded that invitation. We do love our neighbor, but we could love so much more!

Now this sermon is not meant to leave us in a state of perpetual guilt – I am never doing enough! But it is to remind us that the invitation of God to the two great commandments to love is never ending, we do not reach it finally at some point, but rather the Christian journey is to step into a consuming fire! It is to be continually open to the invitation of love. It is to put aside all complacency and recognize the unfathomable love of God and that the call to love our neighbor as ourselves is, at its limits, Saint John reminds us in this morning Epistle, about giving up our whole lives for one another (1 John 3:16).

Going back to today's Collect, we know I think what it is to pray that we might have a perpetual love of God, but what does it mean to pray that we might have a perpetual fear of God? Well what is the danger in the Epistle if we do not love our neighbor? Saint John says in the Epistle, "Whoever hates a brother or sister is a murderer and does not have eternal life abiding in him! Whoever closes his or her heart to a brother or sister in need, the love of God, that is, the Holy Spirit, does not dwell in him!" Could there be any worse danger than that God would depart from dwelling in us?

What is the danger in the Gospel for those who do not heed the invitation to God's feast? "I say to you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper". The degree to which we did not heed the invitation, is the degree to which we do not taste of that supper. And we ought to reverence, have an awe of, the One who is inviting us, so that we take it seriously, that we do not become complacent on our journey, but are continually open to the possibilities, to the opportunities to receive grace and to love. And are right to ask to be roused by fear if not love. When we find ourselves spiritually sleepy, that in that moment we are reawakened to the dangers we are in when we begin to fall asleep! The invite is coming to each of us directly from none other than the One who made us, who redeemed us, who desires to sanctify us and fill us with grace!

This morning we are here. And the Good News is that we are precisely those for whom our Lord has come into the world to save and to invite to his feast. We are the poor, the blind, the lame, and maimed who, by grace, have heeded the invitation – we have come here today because we are poor in spirit knowing we lack much, we do not see as we would like, we are crippled in some ways from being able to love, and we are maimed by our sin and the sin of others against us.

Let us ready ourselves now with joy and love for that glad banquet he has prepared for us, repenting of our sins, trusting in His forgiveness,

and praying that God might keep us under the protection of His good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of His holy Name. Amen