



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
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Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 6, 2013

“Afterward You Will Eat And Drink”

(Luke 17:7-10)

Rev. David K. Groth

7 "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? 8 Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? 9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

Collect of the Day

O God, our refuge and strength, the author of all godliness, by Your grace hear the prayers of Your Church. Grant that those things which we ask in faith we may receive through Your bountiful mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

In his autobiography entitled “Yes, Chef”, celebrity chef Marcus Samuelsson speaks of the hierarchy in the professional European kitchens. It’s almost like the military. At the top is the Executive Chef and then under him the Sous Chef, then the Line Cooks, the Pastry Chef, all the way down to the choppers and moppers and the dish washers. Whatever your status, you have to know where you’re at in the pecking order. When a chef above you asks for something, you say “Yes, Chef”, and double time it without question or delay. If you do it well, you don’t expect any thank you’s or recognition. If you do it poorly you can expect someone to go on a rant and demean you and call you all sorts of names. The demands of the hierarchy and the verbal abuse is part of the kitchen culture.

Samuelsson said a lot of fine American cooks don’t make it in European kitchens. It isn’t for lack of skills or experience or work ethic. It’s for lack of humility. A lot of Americans want to be seen and heard and recognized, to stand out and make a mark. Wanting to be noticed they try to make small talk with the head chef, which is like a private trying to make small talk with a three star general. Being noticed by the head chef often leads to being fired. So Samuelsson says better just to do your job, keep your head low and try not to be noticed (pp.165ff).

The parable in our Gospel lesson shares some of these dynamics. The situation is that of a small

farmer who has one slave. This slave does double duty, in the field and in the house. Plowing with oxen or keeping sheep was hard, dirty, tiring work. At the end of such a day you just want to wash up and have a nice hot meal served you. But is that how slaves are treated? Does a slave master say, “Here, you’ve worked hard! Have a seat at the table and let me serve you now.” Of course not! Remember, he’s a slave and can expect no thanks or recognition from the master. Instead, the master would say, ‘Now prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink.’”

Hard service is expected of slaves. Nobody expects anything else. The slave himself understands his time and labor belong to the master. He just wants to get through the day and have a meal at the end. He wants to do his job and keep his head low and try not to be noticed. Then Jesus says to his disciples, his followers, (that’s us): “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

You see what Jesus is doing here? With this parable Jesus is preparing us to do the work in God’s kingdom, however inconvenient or difficult . . . do the work without looking for thanks or recognition, without needing to be seen or heard or to stand out.

It’s October, *Pastor Appreciation Month*. How does that fit in with this text? It doesn’t! And it would be ok with me if that just disappeared. This text is a reminder that pastors are unworthy servants. We all are. We know what makes us unworthy. It’s our sin and rebellion, sins of commission and omission. If you were a master, would you want that kind of servant, the one that’s always shaking his fist at you and thumbing his nose at your commands? Each of us brings a lot of liability into the Lord’s Kingdom, and yet, see how the Lord loves us and saves us through his Son!

“We are unworthy servants; we have only done

what was our duty.” Whatever we do in the kingdom of God, whatever your role, don’t do it for the recognition. Remember what Jesus said? “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.” When you give to the poor sound no trumpet that you may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, you have received your reward. (Mt. 6:1). But when you give . . . of your time, talents or treasures keep your head low and try not to be noticed.

I realize this is contrary to those principles of retaining volunteers. I’m told every church should have a Comprehensive Volunteer Recognition Plan. It includes cards and certificates, phone calls and flowers and awards ceremonies and banquets. Don’t hold your breath. That all sounds pretty costly; it might be cheaper just to hire out the work! Moreover, we know that when we serve others we are ultimately serving the Lord. Do we really need thanks and recognition for that? In a way, doesn’t that spoil everything? After all, our motives should not be to *receive* thanks and praise but to give the Lord thanks and praise. Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17).

As a boy in Delavan, I didn’t think church was any fun at all. And after Pastor Wilkie left Delavan to come here, to Good Shepherd, it was even less fun. The District Office assigned us a vacancy pastor. He hadn’t been in the pulpit for years and apparently a lot had built up during those quiet years. A couple of his sermons were approaching forty-five, fifty minutes. Tack on some long hymns from TLH with 8, 10, 12 verses, maybe a Baptism and Holy Communion. It was hard; we put in our time. I grew to love the smell of the smoke of extinguished candles.

We always sat in the balcony and after the service, walking down those balcony steps, I very clearly remember feeling I had just done God a favor. He probably owes me one now. But I had it backwards, right? The Lord serves us in worship, not the other way around.

He gives us his Word and Sacrament for our faith and forgiveness which we need more than anything, far more than he needs to hear our half-hearted singing and the mouthing of our prayers.

We all get it backwards and sometimes begin to think our good works put God in our debt. We wouldn't say that out loud; that's unseemly. But it's easy enough to think it. And sometimes in a crisis we do say it. "How could the Lord have let this happen to me" the unspoken words being, "after all I've done for him."

When we think like that, we're turning undeserved grace into nothing more than a payment we have coming to us. When we think like that we're turning his amazing generosity into a stipend for our puny, imperfect acts of service. Truth is we can never put God in our debt. When we have done our best, we have only done our duty. When we've done our best we're still unworthy servants who can make no claims on God. "Then what becomes of our boasting?" asks Paul. "It is excluded . . . for we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Rom. 3:27).

Some time ago I read an article about a generation of young men and women in America who grew up on participation awards. For example, when they played soccer or entered a science fair at school, it was common for all to receive some sort of ribbon or certificate or even a trophy. They didn't have to win anything; just their participation was enough. That generation is now entering the work force and some of them are miffed when they don't receive regular recognition and thanks from their employers. They want that and some need it . . . not for going the extra mile or winning the huge contract, but just for doing their jobs. Employers are finding if that they don't play along, they lose some of their best and brightest young workers. And so some corporations are hiring extra people whose job description is to go around and recognize and celebrate and thank people for doing

their jobs.

In the parable, the daily work of a slave does not bring any special rewards. He is entitled to nothing, not even a simple “thank you” from his master. Moreover, this parable teaches at no point can a disciple say, “I’ve done my time out there in the field; now I want to be served.” A servant is a servant all his days.

The Good News here is that our Lord does not and will not act like the master in this parable. To the contrary, our Lord is kind and generous beyond all measure.

Remember our Lord is the one who dressed himself for service, with a towel around his waist, and then he got on his hands and knees and washed the feet of his servants. Our Lord is the one who does celebrate the work of his servants. From the parable in Matthew 25, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much!”

Our Lord generously rewards even those who haven’t done that much. Remember the parable of the workers in the vineyard, where those who started working at the tail-end of the day still received a full day’s payment? Those who were out there since early morning didn’t think it was fair, and it wasn’t, but their argument was with the owner’s grace and generosity. But the owner can do what he wants with his own resources and this owner wishes to lavish his generosity even on those who didn’t earn it.

Our Lord is the one who did the hard and dirty work, the one who bore our sin on the cross. When the going got tough, his servants had fled. But afterwards he finds them, not to scold and punish them, but to forgive and prepare for them a meal: shore breakfast.

This master is the host at this meal [Lord’s Supper]. He serves us not something easy and cheap from the deli, but something far more costly and personal – his precious body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

One last thing: there's a little promise tucked away in this parable. I've been looking at this text all week and didn't see it until the very end. Rather gruffly, the master says to his slave, "Prepare my supper, dress properly, serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink." He reminds him of his place, but at the same time, he makes a promise. "Afterward, you will eat and drink." Makes me think of that great high feast in heaven, "a feast of fat things" Isaiah calls it, the best of meats and the finest of wines, and all the saints somehow gathered around at table, and him, our master, our host, our Savior, face to face.

Dear friends, now is the time to serve him joyously and gratefully. Later . . . afterward we will eat and drink. Amen.

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