

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Luke 14:1-11
September 23rd, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Friend, Go Up Higher

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

We cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven without much tribulation. For while the Kingdom of Heaven is a magnificent and glorious and undeserved gift, it does not come easily. Not because the Lord does not freely give it, but because we do not readily receive it. For by our actions—our chasing after the things of this life—we show that we tend not to prefer this gift of the Lord's Kingdom. And we are also prone to see it not as a gift, but as something we have a right to, something we have earned and deserved on account of who we are and to what parish we belong and with what diocese we affiliate. Therefore, we must pray, "*Thy kingdom come,*" not because we need fear that the Lord will forget, but because we are inclined to forget, to ignore, and to make light of His kingdom—and the entrance He has so graciously given us in the waters of Holy Baptism. We are prone to forget, ignore and make light of the fact that right now, here in this place, we miraculously stand within the Lord's Kingdom with our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ.

And although we stand in the Lord's Kingdom at this moment, we cannot to side step affliction, heart ache and grief in this life. Rather, the tribulations we endure in this life are precisely the route we must take as we enter into the Kingdom of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. For there is no other way. There is no smoother route. There is no short cut. For all who believe on the Lord + Jesus Christ will suffer persecution from the devil, the world, and their own flesh, because through faith we have made of them enemies that will not tolerate our happiness. But, in enduring the persecutions of this life through faith we will enter into the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

So then, we should never think that our life together in Christ will be free of struggle, suffering, or hard work. For when we were baptized, we not only took on a great Friend; we also lined ourselves up against a determined enemy. Certainly, we were delivered from the power of sin, death and the devil because we were buried with Christ in our Holy Baptism, and received all the benefits that He won for us on the tree of the holy cross. But at our Holy Baptism, some of us through our sponsors, we also renounced the devil, and all his works, and all his ways—and the devil will not take that sitting down. We also promised to live courageously against our fears and to forsake our sinful desires—and the devil and society will do all they can to help us break that promise, and to forfeit our inheritance. This is why we cling to our Lord + Jesus Christ in faith that He will keep His promises and grant us a peaceful sleep and an eternal home in Heaven. The reward is great. It is something we greatly desire. Therefore,

as long as we have breath, we struggle, and make every effort, to enter through the narrow gate, which is only obtained through much tribulation from the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

But do not believe that your struggles and strivings are chiefly against the many things that are thrown at you that you cannot control. And do not believe that your greatest struggle and striving comes when you are sick, or when disaster strikes, or when you are ridiculed, or when you are prevented from practicing the Faith. These are certainly things that try the soul. But your chief enemy is yourself. Your failure to keep the Commandments, and your desire to do whatever your sinful flesh desires. This leads us into pride, thinking that we have a right to do what we want, because we are basically good people. When we reach this point, we have forgotten that all we are and all we have depends on the Lord's mercy. And it leads us to ignore the reality that our heart's desire should be nowhere else than here—in the Lord's Kingdom, gathered with the saints and martyrs, with the holy angels and the blessed dead, eating the Bread of eternal life and drinking the Cup of everlasting salvation.

In reality, we have no right to be here. But we are here, not because we impressed the Lord with our greatness, but because the Father by His Holy Ghost impressed upon our heart and mind the transforming image of His Son, our Savior + Jesus Christ. So we stand here, today, in the presence of the Blessed Holy Trinity, only because He is merciful; because He is compassionate; because He is willing to overlook our past; because He has resurrected us from being dead in our sins and trespasses through the washing of regeneration; and because He desires us even though we do not always desire Him.

Our Lord's mercy is so great, so wonderful, so large, that He even uses your pastor—as unworthy as he is—to invite you—as hesitant as you are—to eat and drink at the table with Him; to come up and be seated at a better seat—in fact the best of seats. For through your pastor, your Lord summons you to eat bread in the Kingdom of God at the table of God. And through His faithful Ministers, our Lord flings open the gates of His kingdom and says, "Enjoy the Sabbath rest found only in the Word of God, which proclaims you to be a cleansed and spotless child of God."

Yet when you come, do not forget how you got here. For if you forget, then you will falsely believe that you have earned the right to enter the Lord's kingdom through your own striving. That is how it is when our base desires take over; when we believe that our works mean something; that they merit something. But here, in the Lord's Kingdom, there is no salvation found in anyone or thing other than the Lord + Jesus Christ. No one's works are better or worse than another's. All of us, in the Lord's Kingdom, are equally undeserving. And all of us, by His mercy, are equally invited to partake of His divine nature.

If you forget what got you here—if you believe that your striving to live godly is what allows you to stand before God—then you are no different than those people who scheme to get best seats at a banquet. They must inevitably bump someone else out of their seat. And they risk being embarrassed by their brashness. Yet they do so to be noticed.

But our heavenly Father already notices you. In His mercy, He notices your willingness to submit yourself entirely to Him through faith. He notices your desire to live against your sinful desires through faith. He notices your striving to do what is good and right in His sight through faith. But most of all, He notices the mark of the holy cross on your forehead and heart; and the seal and gift of the Holy Ghost given in Holy Baptism which created that faith for Him in you. Therefore, He notices the image of His Son + Jesus Christ, and sees His works and His merits covering you through faith.

Therefore, have no fear that you will go unnoticed; or that the Father will forget you. Do not give into your desire to better yourself at the expense of someone else. Do not compare yourself with anyone else so that you can see how you measure up. And do not strive as if you are in competition with others.

Instead, know and understand and believe that our Father, due to His inexplicable and unspeakable mercy, gives you a place at His table in the marriage feast of the Lamb which has no end. For He says to you, "*Friend, come up higher*. Come into my heavenly Kingdom prepared for you by My Son." And repenting of yourself, strive not for the highest place, but for the lowest place—so that you might honor everyone else that has been baptized and allowed to stand before the Lord in His Kingdom. For then you will, as St. Paul tells the Church at Ephesus, "*walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!