

Luke 13:22-30; Hebrews 12:4-24

August 25, 2019

“Our Teacher”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

11th Sunday af. Pentecost

Vicar Miguel Gonzalez-Feliciano

Grace Mercy and Peace be to you from God our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“A penny saved is a penny earned.”

“Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.”

These were common phrases I heard from my third-grade teacher, but her favorite was the last one. She loved organization and expected it of all her students. I’ve learned that this is normal for a third-grade teacher. I also didn’t really question it, even though she also said, “There’s no such thing as a dumb question”.

There was once a teacher who struggled with questions. Not in answering the questions asked of him, but in the quality of questions. The saying, “there is no such thing as a dumb question,” may have been true, but the problem was the questions were always missing the point.

On one such occasion, he was going on his way to Jerusalem. While the teacher was walking there, Jesus was asked a question, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” Now, in true Jesus fashion, Jesus doesn’t simply answer with a yes or no. Rather, Jesus talks about the question that should have been asked,

“How do I know I’m going to be saved?”

Jesus, both God and man, knowing more than just a yes or no talks about the narrow door. Jesus also talks about those who strive to enter in through the narrow door and if they don’t, He says, there will only be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In this way, Jesus doesn't bother with how many will be saved. He instead says that there will be many who will knock at the door and be unknown to the master of the house.

See, Jesus doesn't leave his students there, while talking about the narrow door, notice His scandalous statement, "And people will come from east and west, and from the north and south, and recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." To the Jews, this was terrible!

Try to imagine this man on the road to the capital of Jerusalem. And imagine in his culture what it would have meant when Jesus said that the last would be first, and the first would be last. It would be as if you were to go to Washington D.C. with the President and he told you that in the future America would become a third world nation! Not a maybe, or perhaps, but a certainty.

This Jewish man hears the first, obviously the Jews, will become the last, and the Gentiles, obviously the last, will be first! No wonder this verse is immediately followed by a threat on Jesus' life by Herod! How could this man come and turn the world of the Jews on its head? Who was he to tell them that God wouldn't recognize their deeds and who was he to say they wouldn't get in the front door? They were offspring of Abraham, the promised descendants! They deserved their place in the house of the Lord!

Often, when you and I read the Gospels so many things seem obvious to us. You can connect the dots from the words of Isaiah, "And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD..." and hear them echoed in the words of Jesus. This has been God's plan all along, to bring you and I into faith in the One True God.

You and I get it, so why couldn't they? Why were they so stubborn and hard of hearts?

Sadly, you and I join the Israelites in continuing to ask the wrong questions. There is a tendency to do this because you and I believe that we've somehow attained a higher level of understanding, "we simply know more". While you and I know that faith is a gift, something that God has given to us,

we tend to forget that there was a lot of growth from the day we were given faith in Baptism, and where you and I are today in our growth. It is a process, that takes experience and learning. You and I are sinners who struggle to travel the straight path, who fail daily in living the new life that we have been called to.

Surely though, the goal is not for us to be “good people” for even the non-believers can be that. Those who aren’t of the faith can restrain themselves from murder, they can keep from stealing, and depending on their relationship with their parents, honoring them might be a piece of cake! But the deep corruption that lives in all people is something different. The Old Adam that needs to be drowned daily. The Adam that rises when we murder with our words, the Sin that drops from our actions when we ignore a brother or sister in need or even revel in their failures.

This Sin is the kind that divides families, that separates us from one another. And we heard about this separation from pastor last week.

Rather than try to be strengthened by our brothers and sisters in Christ, you and I fall into the trap of becoming experts in isolation. It is no wonder that the companies that have experienced growth give us goods and services without even speaking to someone. No longer do we even have to check out with a cashier at Wal-Mart, we just go to self-checkout.

Time and time again, you and I choose to do things by ourselves and slowly but surely,

Your head begins to droop as you focus on yourself.

Knees get weak under the weight of handling life alone.

You and I wander from the straight path.

You might not doubt your salvation, because we are baptized children of God, but at times, the loneliness and difficulty of life seem almost crushing.

This is what happens when we “look out for number one,” the first becomes last.

Hear the words of our teacher.

“Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28)

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Is. 43:1)

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9)

You and I are not alone.

You and I have a God who so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to give us grace and forgiveness of sins. This Son, both God and man, came and lived among His creation.

He has called us out of our darkness and sin into the marvelous light of the new kingdom! There may be suffering in this world, it may feel as though we are caught up in an endless cycle of sinning, confessing, and then being forgiven. Strengthen the weak knees and lift your eyes to the hills and see where your help comes from, it comes from the Lord, the Maker of Heaven and Earth!

This same God has gathered us, obviously the last, deserving only death and hell, to be heirs. Once enemies of God, least of all among the peoples, God has made us heirs to the kingdom of God. Therefore, we rejoice with one another as a family.

Bearing one another's burdens in love.

Giving grace and mercy as ones who have received it ourselves.

One day, you and I will walk in the new kingdom. An unshakeable kingdom that will have no end. After that walk, we will be blessed to recline at the table prepared for us by our Teacher. Our Teacher who came down from heaven, was crucified, died, and was buried. But He rose again.

REJOICE always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. AMEN! (1 Thess. 5:16–18)
