

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

22 September, Anno Domini 2024

St. Luke 14:1-11

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

Beloved children of God,

Suffering makes people uncomfortable. And I'm not talking about the people enduring the suffering. Of course, they are uncomfortable. Their bodies may be wracked with pain. They may feel like a hideous sight to behold. They sit under clouds of despair and hopelessness, loneliness and uselessness. They may be afflicted with feelings of guilt and shame. They struggle against pride when they are in need. The afflicted are definitely uncomfortable to say the least.

But suffering also makes everyone around the sufferer uncomfortable. In part because they don't know what to say since they can't fix the problem. Maybe also because they think suffering is a sign of moral failure and is deserved. Maybe, particularly when it is an outwardly physical malady, they are repulsed by it. Some simply don't want to have to confront the reality of suffering. Consequently, quite often our response to suffering is to pretend as though we didn't see it, to turn our eyes away and hope that the suffering person goes away so that we don't have to be uncomfortable or have an awkward conversation or be inconvenienced. This is loveless and cruel. This is being more wrapped up in ourselves than being concerned for our neighbor. This is evil and we need to repent.

Certainly the man suffering from dropsy (or edema as we know it today) was suffering. Edema can be very painful and people suffering from it can become very self-conscious. It can be debilitating and make it very hard to perform basic, necessary tasks. But the Pharisees and the lawyers weren't paying any attention to this man. They had other, more important things to focus on. They had places of honor to find. They had people to impress.

And, above all, they needed to watch this Jesus like a hawk. They needed to not miss a single thing Jesus did in case He were to slip up and they could catch Him and throw accusations at Him. They didn't want to miss an opportunity to shame and discredit Jesus in the eyes of His followers. And if they could do that, of course, they would also shine a little more brightly in everyone's eyes. Like a serpent hunting its prey, their eyes were locked on Jesus and they would not allow themselves to be distracted by someone needing mercy and the Word of God. They abandoned their vocation of speaking the Word of God to this man in the midst of his suffering.

But Jesus' eyes are fixed on this afflicted man. And St. Luke wants to draw your eyes to the same place. "And, behold..." It is as if the Holy Spirit is saying "Look at this man. Behold him in his need. Don't ignore him because you are uncomfortable or have more pressing things to attend to. Take notice of him and have mercy upon him. You can't take his suffering away but you can be with him in his suffering. You can point him to Christ who suffered and died for him that even in the suffering he now endures He may know God's mercy. You can probably help him and provide him some kind of relief or make his life easier in some way. Don't ignore him. Don't be afraid of him. Don't dismiss him as an inconvenience.

Such are the hearts of sinful men. Our attention is always given to the wrong thing. We are always looking for ways to improve ourselves, enrich ourselves, ingratiate ourselves to others, preserve ourselves, protect ourselves. We want honor and esteem. We want to advance and if that means someone else is collateral damage, so be it. We want to be included and important. We want to be oohed and awwwwed over. We want the praises and rewards of men. We call pride piety. We call greed good stewardship. We say we are being wise as serpents when we fail to speak the truth in the face of falsehood.

These are pernicious and evil lies that we tell ourselves to justify ignoring the weak, the broken, and the outcast. How could the man with dropsy possibly help

the lawyers and Pharisees in their search for influence and prestige? How could the homeless woman under the bridge ever help me toward financial independence? How could those poor beggars help balance the church's budget?

Repent and praise God that His attention is not on those who can benefit Him and help Him achieve His goals or pay Him back for His favor. Jesus' attention is firmly fixed upon those whom men despise and reject as weak and worthless and foolish. Jesus' attention is on those who have nothing to offer Him, nothing with which to repay Him. Jesus beholds you. He sees your tears. He hears your sighs and moans and cries. He beholds you, He looks for you, not because you have something to offer Him but because He has something to offer you. He has life and salvation. He has forgiveness and peace. He has, indeed He is, your daily bread.

He beheld you in your pitiful state, swollen full of sin and pride, lust and anger, bitterness and idolatry, shame and depression. He saw you as you were dying of your own foolishness. He beheld you and had mercy on you. He pulled you out of the death of sin.

In the waters of Holy Baptism God drained from you every drop of guilt and shame and filled you instead with His Holy Spirit and life. And He has invited you to sit at His wedding feast where He feeds you with His Body and Blood that His life and His righteousness might become your own. He has exalted you to be son and daughters of the Most High God. And at His feast there are no higher or lower places. All are made one as we kneel together before the God of heaven and earth to receive from His hand the same gifts and blessings. Here there is no room for pride or glory-seeking. There is no place for division or rank. Rich and poor, healthy and sick, weak and strong, neophytes and life-long Christians - all are one in Christ. All Christians have an equal share in the same salvation. All Christians are equally children of God. All rejoice together as one. All weep together as one. No one is before or after another. No one is more important or valuable to the church than another. "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Eph. 4:4-5)

Children of God, look around you. Let your eyes seek out and be drawn to the suffering and downcast, the sick and broken, the weak and despised. Don't clamor for the favor and praise of the powerful and strong and successful. Don't seek any exaltation for yourself. Any elevation you receive from the world is despised by God. Rather, humble yourselves before Him who humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross for you. He will exalt you at the right time. Humble yourselves before one another, not thinking more highly of yourselves than you ought. Rather than turning a blind eye to the afflicted, fix your eyes and will upon them to show them mercy and do them good. "...walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.