

11th Sunday after Pentecost- Proper 16 (C)

Luke 13: 10-17 -

If not now, then when?

August 21, 2022

Christ Episcopal Church

Towanda, Pa.

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The outcast and outsider is found and welcomed by Jesus in the narrative of Luke today. Luke consistently champions the outsider in his writing. The religious establishment is aghast of the actions of Jesus that take on the sabbath; a healing. In his response, He calls out again this week as last week: , “you hypocrites!”

Hypocrisy is a disconnect between the moral values and standards that we hold dear and the actual practice of our behavior in their negations. . It smacks against authenticity. This is what Jesus is claiming to the leader of the synagogue after his response to the woman in pain.

In particular, religious hypocrisy, is a most destructive kind. We know that is has driven many out of the church. I had a conversation yesterday with a father of five who cannot tolerate this in the institution itself, pedophilia being the last straw. Needless to say, his family is not being exposed to formation which we in the church hold so dear. I personally find this to be one of the

most significant tragedies in our modern day. Many families today find themselves in this situation. Even in our own denomination, behaviors in leadership can often destroy faithful relationships groomed over many years.

In the gospel text today, from the perspective of the temple leader, the sacred teachings are used to elevate self-deception. It creates distortion of Truth in its substitutions. Jesus is speaking truth back to the powers of the day and remarking on the struggle to maintain integrity. In striking contrast, the self righteousness of the temple leader was deciding whether and when the suffering woman was worthy of compassion. Keep in mind that this leader was faithfully following the letter of the Jewish law. However, have you ever considered that every law is not just ...just because it's legal. Think about the ramifications of that statement. This claim could be a whole sermon or course in Ethics all on its own!

We human beings need a sense of order for our security. Law is needed to organize communities, and doctrines to articulate our beliefs. These in themselves are not bad things. However, when worship becomes ultimately

the very thing that gives a sense of that order, and it becomes the central focus, then this becomes idolatrous.

What do I mean by this? When we approach with certainty, beyond doubt, without compassion and a sense of justice, we are moving against the intentions of our Creator. Jesus is not accepting a delay in compassionate response to the suffering woman. . Today is the day! For her healing. It is now , and if not now, then when? There is a theme of wider consequence on that day. Today is a day of no more delay. There will be no more deliberations before we act on behalf of the needs of another. And. if not now, then when? Jesus responds compassionately and immediately¹

Let us remember here that Jesus was a devout Jew himself. He was called to obedience of that law. We see him here working on behalf of another in contradiction to that Jewish law. Herein, Jesus is opening up a new approach, in fact setting the stage for the new conscience as much as the Pharisees of his time were. What Jesus wanted to convey to them and to us is a reorientation of taking in and responding to God's message.

¹ Sermon Brainwave Pentecost 11C for August 21, 2022- Lutheran Seminary

The reorientation emphasizes heart intention and compassion. Jesus is not discounting them, we have to be careful in our tendency towards demonization of the other. Herein lies the risk of scripture interpretation. What comes out, Jesus is saying I believe, is our “take” of interpretation. If we understand God, we care for all of his creation. We cease to set up distinction, exclusivity. Instead of seeing what unites us, we put way too much effort on division and naming others “other-ness” .

This is what our global Anglican/Episcopal bishops struggled with at Lambeth Conference. If you have not seen videos, there is a reflection offered by Bishop Kevin and his wife Patti which is referenced in my printed sermon.^{2 3}

What is most telling of our Episcopal church world wide is the ability of extraordinarily diverse cultures to come together and sit inside division and cultural norms to struggle for unity, for the Christian perspective which is understood differently yet witnessed together. This is what bishops around the world did at Lambeth Conference in regards to the call for human dignity.

For Christians, the bottom line about power and control is best understood in this way: its negative use, like that of the leader of the synagogue, is a function of” power over and against.” Whenever we use power over others in

² www.diobeth.org “*Lambeth Conference Reflections*”. Bishop Kevin and Patti Nichols, The Reverend Barbara Harrison Seward

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7dGp2lyUoM> *Lambeth Conference Reflections - Part 2*

the absence of love, the action leaves us separated from God and the values of God. It denies access to God-given-ness within each of us.[For me, this seems to be our litmus test, our discernment piece in our every decision making]. The leader of the synagogue attempted to preserve his own power and control of the community by using the power of his authority and a literal expression of Sabbath law to dishonor and weaken Jesus and control those present so they would not follow a rival.⁴

But the Gospel story also provides an example of the better way to use power. Today we witness Jesus acting out of compassion for the plight of the crippled woman and employing for her benefit the greatest power in the universe, the power of love. He used that power for, not against, not to control, but to help and heal and give life. Jesus used his power – the power of the Holy Spirit – the power of compassionate love – to heal the woman. This is the Jesus about whom St. Paul wrote in Philippians 2 as the human Lord who did not misuse the power of God, did not exploit it with selfish purposes, but humbled himself in obedience to God – giving himself away, even unto death on a cross.⁵

⁴ Ken Kresselus - *Sermons that Work* - Power and Control Pentecost 16C 2019

⁵ *Ibid*

The mother of a dear friend of mine died at the end of July. She was 96 years old and carried a magnanimous soul in a very small body. A large part of the mission in her life was to be an organist for her church. A huge soul, a tiny body, which exemplified generosity in integrity, hospitality, and caring in little ways which always pointed people to God. She gave her life away in her music, her stories, her mothering to many.

I send you today with words from her benediction which I am tailoring as a dedication on our path of faithfulness to God in Christ:

May you be reminded of the faithfulness of the God who has called you.

May you be reminded as you go out in your days of the cloud of witnesses that precede you - who have shown us a way moving forward in following Jesus in great deeds and in small.

They have lined their lives with Christ. And we would be wise to follow in their footsteps.

We are blessed in the memory of those who go before us, not lost to our hearts and memories.

May we glorify God in every day in actions which honor the dignity of each and every creature , recognizing the Christ light in each one. If not now, then when? Amen.