

## Trinity 13, 2021

"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts."  
(Galatians 5. 24)

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

Last week, the Lord Jesus healed the man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. 'Ephphatha' He said. 'Be opened!' And immediately the man's ears were opened and his tongue was freed up, and he spoke plainly. This week, the need for us to be open – to be open to our need for the new life in Christ is further explained. A key point from last week is underlined: we are not sufficient of ourselves; our sufficiency is from God.

The Gospel presents this message today in the familiar story of the Good Samaritan. On the one hand, it is about being a good neighbour. That is, afterall, what Jesus asked the lawyer at the end of the parable: "Which of these three, do you think, was neighbour to the man that fell among the thieves?" "The one that showed mercy on him," the lawyer replied. "Go," said Jesus "and do likewise".

However, there is another piece to be recognized. We are called to imitate that Good Samaritan only because Jesus the Son of God came from Heaven as *our* Good Samaritan. Our human condition is represented by the man who robbed and left for dead; and, we have been rescued, forgiven, lifted up and healed by Christ. We are not able to help ourselves. We are not sufficient on our own. Our sufficiency is from God.

The point is, acknowledging that truth, not just with the head, but deeply in the heart, will cause us to live differently. It will make us see people in a different light. If I truly believe that Jesus came and took all of my sins upon Himself – the impure and ugly thoughts, the cutting words, the selfish actions – and that He mercifully did that freely, how can I not go and do likewise? None of us are sufficient alone. We need Christ, and we need each other.

- Before going any further, it may be helpful to think about *why* we are not sufficient in and of ourselves. First of all, our human need – our insufficiency – was no surprise to the Greek philosophers, poets and playwrights; nor was it strange to William Shakespeare. This is clear through what is called 'the tragic flaw'. The ancient Greeks called it

'harmartia', which means "to err or to miss the mark". Basically, recognizing the limits of our broken, insufficient and sinful human nature, the hero in the play would be given a particular defect that would affect their actions or abilities and eventually lead to their downfall. This 'flaw' was not the same as an honest mistake. It was an inherent personality defect. For example, it could be selfishness; lack of judgment; greed; indecision; self-doubt; anger; misplaced loyalty; extreme curiosity.

Let's take, Romeo: as one scholar put it, "Romeo's greatest **tragic flaw** is his immaturity, which means that he makes irrational choices, and ignores good advice. He rushes into action without thinking quickly, such as when he marries Juliet after only knowing her for a short time. The point here, is simply to say that, while we may have a difficult time grasping our insufficiencies, those before us had a good understanding of them."

One of our tragic flaws as North Americans is our reluctance to acknowledge our limitations. In his article entitled, 'Everyone is Incomplete' scientist, Sinan Canan says, "many more problems occur in human coexistence than with coexistence in nature. This is because humans tend to bring their 'adequacy' into the forefront instead of their insufficiency. Especially in modern social life it is seen as a virtue to hide your 'shortcomings' and...to present oneself as competent and proficient (even in areas s/he is not)." In the end, by doing this, we encourage 'dog-eat-dog' competition rather than unity.

It is interesting to me, that our tragic flaw has been and continues to be recognized by secular science in addition to the secular literary world. Why? Because it is a Biblical truth. As St. Paul told the Church in Rome, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3.23). We all have a tragic flaw. We all are represented by that man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves, was beaten up, and left half dead on the side of the road. As mere mortals, we are less than what God intended for the human race when He created Adam and Eve.

Article IX on page 702 of the Prayer Book summarizes our condition in these words (on the fifth line down): "Man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit". As a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, an infection of sin has entered our human nature; and, it is the root of our tragic flaws.

This is where today's Epistle comes in. Writing to the Galatians, St. Paul says, "The desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that you cannot do the things that you would." He goes on to describe the works of the flesh – the temptations and sins -- (perhaps we could look at this together, page 238) that will rob us of our happiness and joy: "adultery, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies".

Paul is simply underlining the spiritual battle that is going on inside of each one of us. Truly, our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5.8) He tries every angle to rob us of our peace and to bring us down.

But we have Jesus, the Good Samaritan, with us! In fact, He has come to dwell in us by His Spirit. Seeing our need, our Heavenly Father sent His Son to our side. With infinite compassion, Jesus came and bound up our wounds. He became our Sin-bearer. He stretched out His arms on the Cross and shed His precious Blood as the full, perfect and sufficient Sacrifice for our sins. He has brought us to the inn – the Church – a hospital for sinners, and administers the medicines of His Word and Sacraments.

By the power of His Spirit, these sacred medicines bring us healing and new life. They help us to acknowledge our tragic flaws and open our hearts to God and to one another. Then, we can begin to live differently as true neighbours: in holy communion with the Trinity and with one another. Unity in Christ Jesus -- that is God's desire for His Church – that we may be one in His Truth and by Grace. (see St. John 17.20-21) Invisibly, but truly, the Holy Spirit is working now to bring a change in perspective and behaviour in our hearts. The seed of God's Word is growing and it has already begun to bear fruit in your life: the fruit which Paul speaks of in this morning's Epistle: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

At the end of the Epistle, St. Paul says, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts". His talking about a death, here. A death to our old ways. A death to the tendency of our tragic flaws. A death to all that holds us back from trusting the Lord Jesus Christ and from following him. A death that will keep us from being good Samaritans to one another.

We are not sufficient of ourselves. We have been saved and redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ, and He calls us and equips us to follow Him. It is sobering to remember that the lawyer's initial question was this: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Loving our neighbour, then, is a necessary part of the answer. It is a requirement for eternal life. May the Lord help us for His glory and for the building up of His Church.

And now unto God Almighty: the father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...