

## **Lay Preachers' Bulletin - September 2019**

*September's lectionary notes have been provided by Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson, Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary, and the Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of ice of Rupert's Land.*

### **September 1 – Pentecost 12**

Luke 14:1, 7-14

The teaching of Jesus in today's Gospel reading about taking the lower place rather than the higher one comes from a time and culture in which hierarchy was embedded in much of life. Most of us will not attend many meals where the seating is arranged in such a manner. Yet, it is a part of human impulse to compare ourselves to one another – and to gage our place against what others have and don't have. We also live in a culture that is highly sensitive to celebrity and public recognition. Jesus' words are not providing a tactic to navigate those social pathways, but to fundamentally undermine them. We are told he is speaking a "parable". The second part of the reading takes it even further. In the culture of Jesus' day, inviting guests to a meal was very frequently all about creating bonds of obligation and indebtedness from those who could do you good in return. Thus, the latter part of the reading – invite those who cannot pay you back. The underlying invitation from Jesus is to choose the path of selfless love and humility. The Christological core of this teaching is that Jesus himself, as the divine Son of God chooses to lay aside divine glory and share our human life and even our death – something we can never repay – and even gives us a banquet in the Eucharist to which we who are by contrast the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind are fed. Where and how do we see our own tendencies to get caught up in the games of human relationships? How might we live into Jesus' call to a different way? How do we cooperate with the Holy Spirit's grace in making us more loving and humble – more conformed to the likeness of Jesus? Where are the opportunities in our lives to invite those in need to our banquets?

## **September 8** - Pentecost 13

Luke 14:25-33

The second verse of the Gospel reading for today is one of those which we find hard to hear. The word hatred carries a lot of emotional force – and coming from Jesus, who commanded us to love everyone, it is unexpected and uncomfortable. The word hatred in Hebrew expression, when applied to two contrasting things, is often a vivid way of expressing an unequivocal preference for one over the other. In this sense, Jesus' words express a clear and absolute priority for following him and his way over anything or anyone else. The list of family members (father and mother, etc.) ends with – “even life itself” signalling the completeness of commitment required. Paradoxically of course, it is only this absolute call to follow Jesus and his way that leads to the place of truly loving all people – family, friends, our own life, and even our enemies – when the circumstances would tempt us to abandon them. As with last week's gospel reading, the Christological core of this is the example of Jesus (referenced in his call to carry the cross), who chooses the way of the cross over the things his family and even disciples would choose, and by doing so loves them beyond anything they could imagine - even into eternal life.

The parables about counting the cost of discipleship are interestingly moderated. The first uses an example of counting the cost to avoid ridicule when one is not able to complete the task – while the second speaks of counting the cost, knowing you cannot pay it, and suing for peace. There was a poster seen in a convent some years ago that read: “count the cost, pay the price, reap the reward.”

One might add – “and when you fail, seek terms of peace (confess your sins), and try again.” The need to persevere in seeking this costly way of discipleship is brought home again in the final sentence – none of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions.” It is a lifelong task to free ourselves from attachments and priorities that or not

God – and it takes a lifetime of grace and forgiveness to truly and fully become a disciple of Jesus. What are the things which hold us back from walking fully in the way of Jesus?

**September 15** – Pentecost 14

Luke 15:1-10

The two parables from today's gospel reading are among the most remembered passages of scripture – the lost sheep and the lost coin. We hear them as Jesus' affirmation of God's love for those who have sinned and gone astray. While that is true, the context which gives rise to Jesus' words is the grumbling of the pharisees and the scribes against him for welcoming sinners and eating with them. The contrast between Jesus and his opponents is central to what we are meant to see. For those who are "upright", respected and are law-abiding folk, seeing others who are not so can engender one of two responses: scorn, judgement, anger and/or distancing because they are wrong or have done wrong – or compassion that leads to loving attempts to restore and bring them back. Jesus' words make it clear – there is more joy in heaven over the one brought back. Paradoxically, by their attitude, the pharisees and scribes are demonstrating themselves to be among the lost – for their ways are not God's ways. Jesus', in remonstrating with them is enacting God's love for them; he seeks to restore the pharisees and scribes, who are meant to be the religious shepherds of their communities, to the way of love and compassion toward their "lost" brothers and sisters.

It is likely no coincidence that Luke gives us this set of parables right after his hard words from last week's gospel about the cost of discipleship – laying aside all other people and priorities before the central command to follow in his way. Who can do that? None of us really – neither the lost sheep or the scribes and pharisees; but God in the person of Jesus, and through the working of the Holy Spirit, is always seeking to bring us back and restore us. Our weekly rhythm of going out from worship, engaging the work of the week

and then returning to open our hearts and minds before God is the lifelong Christian pattern of seeking week by week to grow into the way of Christ amidst the trials, failures and temptations of life.

### **September 22 - Pentecost 15**

Luke 16:1-13

The parable in today's gospel is another of those which, if we are paying attention, will likely leave us a bit troubled or bewildered, or perhaps even affronted. The story tells us of a manager who has been squandering his master's goods and is about to be dismissed for it. However, before he is formally dismissed, he seeks to save his own hide by forgiving debts – not owed to himself – but owed to his master! He buys friendship with his master's debtors, using his master's wealth, and when he is found out, the master *commends* the "dishonest manager." We are used to reading the parables in a way that sees references to kings, masters and the like as representing God; but in this case there is no such parallel intended. Quite the opposite – Jesus is using a parable about worldly ways to teach about heavenly things: those wise in the ways of the world use the goods and means of the world shrewdly to ensure their success or security in this world and receive approval from "the world"; but those who are wise in the ways of God, should use the goods and means of the world, not for worldly ends, but for Godly ends. The second part of the parable's teaching reiterates the point; the "little things" are the wealth of the world, and the greater things ("much") are the true riches of God's kingdom. We are not to use the "little things" for our own gain as the dishonest steward in the parable (that would be to seek approval from this world), but to use them for the greater good of God's kingdom, and thereby show ourselves worthy of the greater riches of God. Thus, we end up with final saying about "no slave can serve two masters"; "you cannot serve God and wealth." Our use of worldly goods demonstrates which master we serve. It is a hard saying for those who live in a wealthy society. Do we use our wealth to serve our master Jesus and

the furthering of his kingdom or to honour the consumerist and wealth-oriented values of the world? It is the hard place, where “the rubber meets the road” for the question “whom do you serve?”

**September 29** - St Michael and All Angels

Revelation 12:7-12

John 1:47-51

The readings for this day are chosen for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. The Revelation selection references the battle of the Archangel Michael with the devil/satan. The readings from Genesis 28:10-17 and John 1:47-51 reference the work and ministry of angels in the broader sense and the gospel reading is based upon the Genesis reading.

In the scriptures and in the ancient teaching of the Church, angels are spiritual beings who are agents of God, carrying out God’s will and purpose. In the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, the biblical stories would simply tell us of a messenger or messengers where we read in English the words angel or angels. The context is what tells us that they are not simply human agents.

The Genesis reading is the famous story of “Jacob’s Ladder”. Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, is departing the “promised land” – fleeing from his angry brother because Jacob has stolen his birthright and his father’s blessing. At night he stops to sleep and has a dream in which he sees a ladder set up connecting earth and heaven with the angels ascending and descending upon it. God speaks to him – and upon waking he declares the place to be “the house of God” and the “gate of heaven.”

The house of God, the gate of heaven, the ladder/connecting point between earth and heaven – these are the images that provide the foundation from the Old Testament that are used by John in the Gospel to speak about Jesus. The first words Jesus speaks in the Gospel of John are to the first disciples;

he says “What are you looking for?” The disciples say, “where are you staying (dwelling)?” Jesus says, “Come and see.” The Gospel says they “came and saw” and stayed with him. In today’s concluding paragraphs of that first chapter of John Jesus tells Nathaniel that he will see “heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” This is the Christological core which stands at the heart of the reading. The divine Word has become flesh and dwelt amongst us – and heaven is joined to the earth in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the house, the “temple” of God’s presence in the world. Jesus is the “way” – the gateway into God’s presence.

There is a fascination in our contemporary context with the notion of sacred places – places which people encounter as being holy and special – places of encounter with God. Christians (along with our ancestor Jacob) have always affirmed that is true; but even more we have affirmed that they are lesser versions of the greater truth – they point the way to the place/person in which the presence of God is most fully scene and known – Jesus Christ.

And so, what of the angels? Christian faith has continued to affirm that in the fullness of God’s creation there are spiritual beings created by and for God who do his work and will largely be unseen in this world. But in the revelation of God in Jesus, we now understand the foundation of their being and work is the same as that of all creation – the one through whom all things are made, the one upon whom they “ascend and descend” – and their work and service find their purpose and fulfillment in Jesus.