

12th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 17, Year C
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger
on August 31, 2025

Sirach 10:12-18 / Psalm 112 / Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 / Luke 14:1, 7-14

*Sing with joy to God our strength
and raise a loud shout to the God of our Salvation. Amen.*

A parishioner in my first parish had kidney failure, I think, in her 30s. She had a transplant and lived a normal life. But transplanted kidneys only have a certain lifespan. By the time I met her, she was in her mid-40s and on the transplant list. She was on a very restrictive diet, getting water only from certain vegetables and ice chips.

It had been so long that the solution was self-dialysis on a regular basis. The NHS was getting her set up with a home dialysis suite and training her how to do self-dialysis. I remember the tour that she gave people: the room where it would be, the media center that she and her husband were going to put in, and the area for refreshments. She would be spending a couple of hours each session in her home dialysis suite. I encouraged her to call it her "spa room" to make it sound more enticing.

Then she started to waffle. She wasn't 100% on board, and the degree to which she was up for this diminished rapidly. She was distraught.

Her sister – without even being asked – donated her kidney to save her life. Her sister was in fine health, and could manage a full life without her second kidney. The sibling-to-sibling transplant took place. And remarkably, the transplanted kidney will now be 19 years old in October. Her name is Prada.

These 2 sisters loved one another, and they made sacrifices because of that love.

Our reading from Hebrews, looked at from the complex context that they were in, is a lesson in making sacrifices for what you love. It is also a warning to be aware of what you love, which may cause you to make bad sacrifices. Because, when you love something or someone, you make sacrifices for them.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, in marriage, you sacrifice – or forego – all others. But if you love money more than others or God, the writer is warning that you will make sacrifices for the sake of money, and those sacrifices – or poor decisions – will have consequences.

The reading from Sirach warns of pride. Pride is an inordinate love of self. We've all known overly proud people to sacrifice friendships and even family relationships. In our Judeo-Christian history, the sacrifice made for the pride of angels was the sin that led to their fall, chief among them the Devil. Adam & Eve sacrificed their place in the Garden of Eden, and may have come to that due to their pride, their love of self.

In the Gospel, Jesus warns against love of position or status. His illustration appears to result in slight embarrassment. But taken in the context of a Sabbath meal, particularly at the home of a leader of the Pharisees, there was much deeper meaning. Sabbath meals are anticipations of God's Kingdom. Add to this that those gathered at this Sabbath meal would have been the learned and the wealthy. They had no concern for the uneducated, the common person or the poor. But Jesus' rebuke of clamoring for status was a reminder that *all* are equal in God's Kingdom.

In addition, Luke's readers were a contentious mix of Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. The Jewish Christians were constantly trying to show that they were first in line for God's favor: First the Jewish Christians, *then* the rest of you. But that is not so in Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus' rebuke of the clamoring for status would have resonated among the mix of Christian converts among Luke's audience.

So, taking a position higher than you are entitled to has the implication that you are more worthy of the Kingdom, or that you think yourself to be God's preferred, or that you are pushing others away from Kingdom access. It would be similar to – but much more deeply significant than – pushing your way to the front of the line for Communion. It is reminiscent of the time of box pews and the servants' galleries in Georgian and Colonial Era church architecture, both of which separated rich from poor, the worthy and the worthless, and deeply contrary to the Gospel teachings of Christ.

So, it's a warning against love of position or status, the fate of which, like love of self, or pride, is to withdraw yourself from God. And what is sin? Sin is to withdraw yourself from God, and Hell, the complete absence of God. From our readings today, it appears we bring Hell upon ourselves by foregoing love of God and of neighbor in place of love of self or status or of money, sex and power.

Only the sensational cases of love of money, sex, power, self and status gain our attention:

- Bernie Madoff
- Harvey Weinstein
- Carly Fiorina
- Roseanne Barr
- Lance Armstrong

The consequences or sacrifices faced by those cases of love of money, sex, power, self and status hit the news, and we were all shocked and horrified. I don't know if there is any correlation between their misguided love and that all but one of those have been divorced at least once, all before their scandals hit the news. Were their marriages one of their sacrifices for their love of something else?

We could never imagine ourselves or anyone we know having such a love of money, sex, power, self and status that they would suffer similarly. Really?!?!

There are degrees of such arrogance. One does not have to be a national figure to fall into the trap of loving something else more than God and neighbor.

Who are the people in your life whom you avoided, watched destroy their careers, became the office pariah, was the department bully, or failed upward – meaning got promoted in order to extract them from the chaotic situation they themselves created? Recall the person you made excuses for by saying, “*But he’s so good at what he does!*” Or maybe you were that person. Those who love something more than God – whose narcissism and arrogance can be felt by everyone around them – make sacrifices for that which they love. Those sacrifices usually come in the form of financial ruin, career suicide and lost relationships.

But Sirach, the writer of Hebrews and Jesus are trying to turn our attention toward love of God and neighbor.

As the Psalm acclaims:

*Hallelujah! Happy are they who love the Lord!
Their heart is right; they put their trust in the Lord.*

When you love something or someone you will make sacrifices for them. Those sacrifices look and feel very different than those who put love of self above all else. They can look and feel like the parishioner who received a kidney from her sister. The sister didn’t donate her kidney thinking that she might receive one in return. I was told yesterday that, unlike 20yrs ago, she is being told to drink *more* for Prada’s sake!

- The sacrifice made for love of God could look like supporting one or more of the ministries of St Stephen’s with your time, talent and treasure.
- The sacrifice made for love of neighbor could look like carving out time for a regular welfare check on a vulnerable member of your community.

- The sacrifice made for love of God could look like devoting your career to serving God's most vulnerable people, like housing the 1,000+ unhoused persons in SLO County, feeding the 40% of SLO County residents who face food insecurity, protecting women from abusive and violent relationships and providing much needed mental health services that would otherwise be out of reach of those who desperately need them. Or you could volunteer or support them financially.
- The sacrifice made for love of neighbor could look like risking your life to flee violence and terrorism, traveling on foot for thousands of miles, risking hunger and disease, simply so your children can have a safe upbringing and stable future.

Today's part of the Letter to the Hebrews started with *"Let mutual love continue."* These are examples of letting mutual love continue. Placing God and God's people above ourselves and not taking the higher position of honor with no regard to who else is "in the room" is integral in letting mutual love continue.

Of course love of God's children can lead to sacrifices with grave consequences. *"I'll do anything for my children"* can lead to the damaging and marginalization of other children and the sacrifice of neighborly relationships in order to get your child in – wait for it – that position of honor, whether in sports or academics or whatever it may be. Or it may result in being drawn into your child's addiction problems, whether that be alcohol, drugs, spending or other vices.

Love for God can be misguided and misinterpreted, not just at the level of those with mental health problems. *"I will follow God's ways"* has for millennia led to the marginalization and oppression of God's people, in particular women and the LGBTQ+ community. It supports racism and xenophobia. And it is the foundation of both Christian Zionism and White Christian Nationalism. As anyone on social media has seen:

If your religion – in this case I would phrase it – if your love of God requires you to hate another person, you need a new religion!

Our religion – our love of God – does not require us to hate any other person. On the contrary: our love of God requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves and to respect the dignity of every human being. Sometimes that is easy, and sometimes it's bloody difficult! And that's what we have one another for in our private prayer and corporate worship.

Which brings us to worship. God asks of us one sacrifice repeatedly throughout scripture: Worship.

*Let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God,
that is, the fruit of lips that confess His name.*

In the Eucharistic Prayer as we lead up to the *Sanctus*, we say:

As we offer you this sacrifice of praise...

Every Eucharistic Prayer has a version of this. I could go into the nuances of Anglican theology on this phrase, but that's for another sermon. For now,

*Let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of
lips that confess His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share
what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

So, if you love someone or something, you will make sacrifices for them. You are called above all else to love God and neighbor. It isn't always easy or straightforward. It is something that we have to work on every day. Resisting love of money, sex, power, self and status is also not always easy or straightforward. And it is something that we have to work on every day.

But, imagine if your sacrifice to love God and neighbor led you to love someone whom no one else seemed to love. What sort of world would this be?!!!