

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 14:1-11

12 October, Anno Domini 2025

Beloved in Christ,

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

The appointed readings for the last two weeks have contrasted the false gods of our hearts and imaginations with the character of the one true God. Certainly never in man's wildest imagination does he conclude that God is merciful and gracious toward sinners by taking on their flesh and offering Himself to death to atone for their sins against Him. At best we would think of Him as a fair judge, rewarding the good people and punishing the bad ones. We would never believe Him to be merciful and compassionate, filled with steadfast love and mercy toward sinners.

But that is exactly what is revealed to us by the Father in His Son, Jesus Christ. And in Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees and lawyers before us today, Jesus encounters that most stubborn of all idols - man's pride and self-righteousness. In the most vivid way, the incompatibility of self pride with the true worship of God, is put on full display.

At the heart of the events of that day was the Law. The Law is absolutely clear "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner in your gates." We are given 6 days to labor and be about our work, as God Himself set the pattern at creation. But the seventh day, the Sabbath, is set aside to God, to gather around His Word and receive life from Him. We do not live by our work, but by His. Indeed, to fail to observe the Sabbath and continue in our own work is to enslave ourselves once again and despise the work of God to our death. The command is not option nor is it up for debate.

And the Pharisees and the lawyers were militant about observing the Law. Would that we were so zealous but for the right reasons. You can tell your pastor whatever you want about why you weren't here every Lord's Day, but don't think that those excuse are valid before the God of heaven and earth who gave and commanded the Sabbath Day and died on the cross to provide the gifts of life and salvation He spreads before you as a free gift. In our day the problem is more that we take a minimalist approach to salvation. "What is the least I have to do to get into

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heaven?" This is where the devilish statement "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian" comes from. It is absolutely Pharisee-speak because it assumes that the Divine Service is something you do to make God happy with you. That is pure works righteousness and that is what our Lord Himself condemns. We should absolutely set aside a day to gather together to the preaching of the Word and the life-giving feast of the Lord's Supper. The Church has freedom as to which day of the week that is but God still commands us to observe that day not only to honor Him as God by obeying His Word but chiefly so that we may receive from His hand forgiveness, life, and salvation and be strengthened in the fellowship of the Holy Christian Church. You don't only come to the Divine Service for yourself. Your presence and your absence in the midst of this family, whether we like it or not, has a direct and profound impact on the whole body - on everyone of your brothers and sister in Christ.

But the lawyers and the Pharisees thought the command was given so that they could make themselves righteous by observing the commandments. Thus they divorced the law from its foundation - love. As Jesus said clearly "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." The law serves love and defines love's boundaries. Thus if doing no work of any kind on the Sabbath causes harm or withholds good from my neighbor, then the law must give way to the good of my neighbor and I must help him as I can. But helping your neighbor isn't a replacement for hearing God's Word or receiving the Sacrament of the Altar. And if you are not in the Lord's house because of anything that is not absolutely necessary, than you are also not loving your neighbor because you are telling him that the gifts of Christ aren't that important or necessary.

As we gather to our Father's house, we don't come to do something for God. God doesn't need anything from us nor do we have anything to give Him except our sin. Instead, we gather so that we may receive gifts from Him. We come to have our sins forgiven, to be taught the Word of truth, to be fed with the living bread that comes down from heaven. We come as beggars. We come with our consciences bloated with the guilt of our sin because Christ has revealed the kindness and graciousness of God to help and to heal all who call upon Him. The Divine Service is actually beautifully pictured for us again in this healing. We go where Jesus tells us He is going to and there He loves us by healing us of the death of our sin.

Do we dare come to this table then bloated with self-righteousness? That would be utterly contrary to the work of Christ. Do we dare come to this table filled with pride, blasphemously imaging our superiority over other sinners or that we do not

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need mercy from God? Do we dare come divided from one another because rather than doing everything in our power to maintain the unity of the Spirit, a unity of faith and love, we allow anger and hurt to fester in our hearts?

Repent. Those who despise the Sabbath Day by their absence and those who despise the Sabbath Day by clinging in any way to their own pride and self-righteousness will face God's temporal and eternal wrath. God has given you the Sabbath for your salvation, for the forgiveness of your sins, not so that you can pat yourself on the back and give thanks to God that you are not like those other sinners or so that you can comfort yourself because you've been to church enough times.

The same is true of the whole Law. No one is saved by works of the Law, chiefly because salvation is only through Christ but also because we are all equally incapable of keeping the Law. That's what the preaching of the Law reveals. We don't keep it and we can't keep it precisely because of the unbelief and idolatry that the Law reveals in our hearts. It reveals the wicked idolatry of our self-righteousness and our desire to be noticed and praised by men. It reveals our bitterness, our lovelessness, our unbelief, our unrighteousness, anger, and our greed.

And praise God that He reveals them! May we not resist. May we not seek to shield our sins and try to explain it away or justify it. May we thank those who love us enough to call us away from our sin and count them as precious as an ornament of God gifted to us by God. May we hate our sin with every fiber of our being and flee away from it to Christ Jesus who forgives sins, who rejoices to receive sinners, who loves to have mercy, and has established the Sabbath for that very purpose - to have mercy on you. And then, enlivened by the healing Word of Christ, may we walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called in all humility and gentleness, patience and love.

The Lord Jesus Christ alone is righteous. He has kept the Law in its purest sense as your brother and Savior. He has fulfilled the Law of love by being incarnate in the midst of sinners and offering His humble and perfect obedience in payment for our pride and self-righteousness. He suffered our arrogance and was crucified under it so that we might not perish eternally as we deserve. Only imagine if Jesus had dealt with us according to strict demands of the Law and not His mercy that lay behind it. Imagine if He had dealt with the Pharisees and us as the Pharisees dealt with the man with dropsy by ignoring us and leaving us in our sin.

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Instead, today He stands before you this day to make you righteous by giving you Himself. He has not dealt with you according to your sin but according to His steadfast love. He has not held your sins against you, but born them in His own body on the cross. The God of heaven and earth has humbled Himself to the point of death so that you might be exalted and given a seat at God's table in His kingdom which has no end.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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