

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Last week in our Gospel lesson we learned of the woman in the synagogue with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. We then heard that she was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. The Gospel then went on to say:

<sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." <sup>13</sup> When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

Of course, this all happened on the Sabbath and that ruffled the feathers of the leaders of the synagogue, nonetheless, disregarding the laws concerning the Sabbath, Jesus reaches out and heals her. My point to this story was not so much about the laws concerning the Sabbath, for me, it was about the assumptions made regarding the woman. She didn't ask to be healed, but it was assumed that she needed to be healed.

I personally experienced this when I opened and held the door for a woman who was in a wheel chair and entering a hospital I was entering at the same time. I actually offended her because I assumed that she was unable to open the door and she let me know it in so many words that she was quite capable of opening the door. I have since spoken to another woman who is restricted to a wheel chair and she too said that I was wrong and I learned that one does not assume, rather one asks, "may I get for you?"

When looking at the assumptions made about this woman in our Gospel last week, there also seemed to be a vague question and assumptions about this woman's moral character due to her crippling ailment found in some of the research I was doing for that sermon. And because of this I preached about the Eighth Commandment and Luther's explanation of this commandment.

When looking at the Eighth Commandment, "You are not to bear false witness against your neighbor." Luther had this explanation in the Large Catechism:

There is a very great difference between judging sin and having knowledge of sin. You may certainly know about a sin, but you should not judge it. I may certainly see and hear that my neighbor sins, but I have no command to tell others about it.

If I were to interfere and pass judgment on my neighbor, I would fall into a sin greater than that of my neighbor. When you become aware of a sin, however, do nothing but turn your ears into a tomb and bury it.<sup>1</sup>

I mentioned this because I feel that if I were to interfere and pass judgment on my neighbor that this would be the same as making assumptions about others. Likewise, this commandment applies once again today to our Gospel lesson because I believe that bearing false witness or making assumptions is at the heart of this parable. And this is where Jesus has us this morning in this parable...assuming and drawing conclusion about others and ourselves.

Listen again to the opening of our Gospel lesson:

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<sup>1</sup> Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. "The Large Catechism" The Eighth Commandment, par 263-266, page 421.

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

<sup>7</sup> When [Jesus] noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.

From the start of our Gospel lesson, we begin making assumptions and it is our assumptions about others and ourselves that parse this parable out for us. After reading this parable, we would never take the place of honor...and we would certainly find a humble lower place to sit. However, in this situation, we would be assuming things about others and from those assumptions we would draw conclusion about them and ourselves. For me this parable traps us in our assumptions about others and ourselves because no matter where we sit, we do so thinking it is a place of honor. Let me unpack this thought.

Our assumptions begin right from the start of the parable. We all know that there was a very profound clash between Jesus and the Pharisees. And through this clash, later Christian animosity is fueled. Pharisees are described as hypocrites or as uncaring legalists who impose on others, burdens that they themselves would not bear. But in reality, most of this is inaccurate, unhistorical, and has become an opinionated attack on Pharisees. But their knowledge and competence of Jewish Law is what gave them the authority and enabled them to be superb moral guides. But today, when we look at the others around us we do so from the perspective of a Pharisee by assuming a Pharisaiic moral perspective and then look at others and judge them through our assumptions about the Pharisees while we ourselves selfishly and inconsequentially assume the grace we are given in Jesus Christ. In other words, I have grace for my sins...but they do not. Or, I'll take this seat in the back because I know God will call me forward.

The challenge that springs up from this parable in this Gospel lesson today is not about assuming the hypocrisy of the Pharisees or choosing the proper seat at a wedding banquet to prove we are righteous and humble Christian folks...it's not about God or Law, covenant or commandment, faith or works...this parable is teaching us about living in the tension of them both and understanding which direction the arrow flies from one to the other as one commentator put it.

Today's parable allows us to think about obedience and understanding in that obedience does not lead to God, but God leads one to obedience. It is a pure gift given to us to sit in the presence of God right now, in this proclaimed Word and at this Holy Meal that is set before us, it is God's presence in these things that makes our life better, it is not our good life that makes this reward of God's presence possible.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, when discerning the direction of the arrow of God's grace and honor, choosing the lowest place is the same as choosing the place of honor. If I choose the rich with the intent of being paid back, am I not in the same way then choosing the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind with the assumption that I will be paid back with God's blessing?

Like the assumptions about woman last week, am I NOT assuming things about either side that will benefit myself in the end? I do not and cannot choose God, or choose how God will react to me God has chosen me, I do not receive God's grace because I choose to sit in the proper place at a banquet.

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<sup>2</sup> Crossan, John Dominic, *In Parables, The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, Sonoma, California: Polebridge Press, 1992. Chapter Four, "Parables of Action," 1. Parables and Ethics. Crossman discusses the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and how we see the Pharisees today and our assumptions about them. Crossan's discussion in this section influenced the last two paragraphs.

Saint John reminds us that we do not choose when he writes:

**14** 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going.' <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'  
(John 14:1-7)

Within this parable Jesus is not appealing to a spirit of material gain that is our hope of our reward for our judgment, rather Jesus is appealing to our faith so that the foundation of our choice will be love. Dorothy Day, an American journalist and a Catholic social activist, from her book, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* said it this way, "Charity is only as warm as those who administer it." Likewise, St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians writes:

<sup>23</sup> Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, <sup>24</sup> since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24)

Assuming the lowest place is just like assuming the place of honor. True honor, like the pure grace of God is given...we do not choose it. St Paul reminds us and the church in Corinth:

For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

God has sent Christ into the world as the demonstration of his love and how God's love is manifest and revealed in the world. Jesus' purpose with this parable was not to condemn the guests or the host but to open them and us to the true joy of God's presence that is before us on this Sabbath day. We learn today the blessed results of truly and lovingly caring for those who cannot care for themselves by not assuming but by simply and truly caring. And in that we find the very presence of God and the grace that is revealed in that caring and loving act that we carry out.

Today we are not taught about assumptions, choices, or judgements...but we are taught about the Good News in the revelation of experiencing God's grace in the others around us, no matter who they are or where they sit in life.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*