

Pentecost 14 (proper 17) St. Luke's 8-29-10 8 & 10

**Be at peace with your soul;  
then heaven and earth will be at peace with you....**

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

Sometimes a quotation I come upon in my week's reading or meditations grabs me and won't let me go. It helps to shape the week and colors whatever thoughts I have about the sermon that marinate in me all week long as well.

Last Monday a passage from a 7<sup>th</sup> century mystic named Isaac the Syrian really spoke to my longing to know just how heaven and earth come together in us in ways that point us to God and to the mystery within us that brings us to worship on a Sunday like this one.

I can't resist telling you the rest of the quote:

***Be at peace with your soul;  
then heaven and earth will be at peace with you.***

***Enter eagerly into the treasure house that is within you,  
and so you will see the things that are in heaven;***

***For there is one single entry to them both.  
The ladder that leads to the kingdom is hidden within your soul.***

***Flee from sin; dive into yourself;  
And in your soul you will discover the stairs by which to ascend.***

The wonder of this sentiment is that we don't have to look outside ourselves for God's wisdom, grace and truth. They are right within us if we seek them and are humbly open to them.

The wisdom from the Gospel parable today is all about humility and hospitality. Jesus comes to dinner in the house of one of the Pharisees and winds up teaching about seeking places of honor. It's a story that produces one of the most famous quotable Scriptural quotes: "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Jesus is always turning upside down our ways of thinking about status and social convention stretching us to see things from a different point of view.

In this case the image is even more powerful in light of how he lives out his own ministry, going to his death in a way that is tremendously humbling before he is exalted.

We may think of many examples of humility in people we know, both in our lives and in literature that uplift us and give us inspiration for living likewise: “*It is a far better thing I do than I have ever done,*” says Sidney Carton in *Tale of Two Cities* as he goes to a guillotine death for honor’s sake.

We read stories and may have had our own experiences of the heroism of someone that stays with us for a lifetime and may just help shape the way we live day to day, or at least we trust will propel us in good ways when the chips are down.

I heard the story of an eyewitness to Dennis and Midge’s accident two weeks ago where the person said Dennis would always be a hero in his eyes because of the way he pushed Midge out of harm’s way and took the blow of the car full body on himself. I have not yet mentioned this to Dennis as he says he only remembers the sound of the revving engine and then coming to in the emergency vehicle afterwards, the whole trauma lost to his memory.

But I am struck by that sense of sacrifice, instinctual perhaps, when one puts out for somebody else’s good, humbling themselves, not looking to be exalted, God knows, but inspiring others by one’s actions.

Seek not the seat of honor, and perhaps it will be given you in the end. Rather seek the lowest seat and hear the host say to you, “Friend, move up higher;” then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.

Luke goes on with the wisdom of the parable, again reversing the expectations of social convention by having us invite not the rich and powerful to our tables, but the poor, the maimed and the blind. True hospitality means taking care of those in need and expecting nothing in return.

What a vision for a church community striving to model heavenly virtues for the good of the larger community. A church doesn't have a mission, but the mission of God has a church. May we be captive of such a mission as we continue to "worship and serve God" through this Christian community.

The Letter to the Hebrews compliments today's wisdom describing examples of mutual love acknowledging how in reaching out to strangers, we just might be entertaining angels unawares. They may indeed be the embodiment of God's presence right in our midst.

That homeless person you give some help to might just be the sign of Christ's presence in your life on that particular day, no matter the conventional wisdom that says giving money to indigent people doesn't really help them. Try telling that to the folks that come to our Food Cupboard each week so grateful for the assist they need in a hard time. So with the Thrift Shop at the Lutheran Church, both places entertaining angels unawares.

Well, the wisdom of the parables, the Letters to the churches, and even the Hebrew Scripture for today all call us to remember the Lord who has brought us out of Egypt, out of whatever tyrannies may have enslaved us, promising to feed us, if we do not forsake him, "with the finest of wheat and honey from the rock."

So humility and hospitality guide and shape us toward the Christian virtues we pray to incarnate in our lives.

Jesus comes to dinner **and guides us all** on the pathway to heaven that Isaac, the 7<sup>th</sup> century Syrian mystic says, "begins and ends in our very own souls as we are at peace therein."

May we all discover at this table,  
in Jesus' real presence,  
on this very day in the community gathered here,  
**that ladder within** that provides the steps on which to ascend,

even now, as we stand to say we believe...

