

15th Sunday after Pentecost: Jer 8:18-9:1; Pslm 79:1-9; 1 Tim 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

One of the great things about the Anglican tradition not unlike the Catholic tradition, is that we remember the saints who have gone before us. The writer of Hebrews talks about this listing all the great people of faith that have gone before to include Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab referring to these people who have gone before us as a "Great Cloud of Witnesses." Keeping in mind if you have received Jesus as your savior, you are already a saint. But we also recognize those who have gone before us who held nothing back in following Jesus as Lord. These are the saints we normally place upon the calendar of saints because they are examples to us of those who have gone before us who have grown up into the description from Hebrews of "the spirits of the righteous made perfect," who are in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:23). Note they are righteous because of what Jesus has done for them, but because of yielding their lives back up to God they are also made perfect in their walk. And some may say to me, "But Heather, no one can be perfect, only Christ was perfect." But Jesus says to us, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," (Matt 5:48). We have been gifted righteousness, but we are called to grow up into maturity. And it is the mature wheat whom we label saints, though we be saints ourselves, because they have gone before us holding nothing back in the manner that Jesus describes saying: "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds," (John 12:24). Some saints die martyrs' deaths and some die spiritually to themselves by picking up their crosses daily to follow Jesus as Lord. And we are told in Revelation chapter 6, verses 10 through 11 of the uncompromising saints who are beneath the very altar in heaven who keep asking, "How long Oh Lord?" Because they are waiting for the Second Coming. But they are told to wait for more brothers and sisters to die for Christ. And what this space in heaven beneath the altar is like, I do not know, I only know that this indicates the saints who have gone before us are in the presence of the Lord. The fact that when we die, we are in the presence of the Lord is revealed to us by Paul, who tells us, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." And when Stephen is being stoned to death, he sees Jesus "*standing* at the right hand of the Father." We are told that Jesus is normally *seated* at the right hand

of the Father, but Stephen sees Jesus standing. Jesus stood up to receive Stephen into heaven, because as we discussed last Sunday, “precious in the eyes of the Lord are the death of his saints,” (Ps 116:15).

On September 12th, we remembered one such saint. And when I say “We” I mean the Anglican tradition in that certain saints are remembered on the day they die, and I like to follow along with this at satucket.com/lectionary/ as this particular site has the scriptures for morning and evening prayer and also gives a bio about the saints on the days that they are remembered. If you follow along also in these readings then every Sunday you can be like, “So that’s what Heather is blathering on about up there,” because you too will have read about these things. And last Monday, we remembered John Henry Hobart. If you know who John Henry Hobart is, then kudos to you. You may know of him because he founded Hobart College. Coincidentally my Grand Uncle who was the second Episcopal Bishop of Maine, Henry Adams Neely, received his Doctor of Divinity from Hobart college. And so, in some strange way, the fruit that Hobart bore helped grow up an ancestor of mine in the word of God. There are ripples that affect others from lives fully surrendered to God and what struck me heavily in reading about Hobart’s life is the fruit he bore for the kingdom in what I consider a short amount of time. Because Hobart died at the age of 55. And when I read about all that he had accomplished before the age of 55, I cannot help but think to myself that I am 56, and I have accomplished so little for the kingdom of heaven. I mean, at 56 years old, I am barely beginning to walk a life even slightly surrendered to God at an age after which Hobart ended. And so, this is why I like reading about the saints. It is because they make me feel *horrible* about myself. But they do inspire. They do make me look at myself and say, “Oh my goodness, I had better get busy.”

And in the account of Hobart as I read it on Satucket.com, he was born in 1774 and by the age of 23 was ordained a deacon and then a priest by the age of 26 and assistant Bishop by the age of 36 and the 3rd Bishop of New York by the age of 44. Keeping in mind that he grew up into this position at a time when the Episcopal church had and I quote, done “very little for about twenty years.” And the reason the church had done very little was that after the American Revolution, people were suspicious of the denomination, because it was tied to the Church of England. But John Henry Hobart did not let this inhibit him, he

was zealous and was reported as caring deeply about the people of New York beginning with 26 clergy and growing them up into 133, and also increasing parishes in the Diocese from 50 to 170 and confirming 15,000 people into the faith. To confirm someone is to receive people who are acknowledging that they understand who Jesus Christ is and what Christ has done for them, and so 15,000 is a very good number indeed. That's eleven and a half times the entire population of Tombstone. And so, "Oh my goodness, we had better get busy." Hobart was also said to have ridden 2,000 miles at a time to do visitations. This is 40 days on horseback. It was literally said of him that he wore out horses. And because of his zeal and his love for the kingdom of heaven, people recognized him to be genuine. During a tight New York gubernatorial race people were saying that "only Hobart would have been easily elected," because he was admired by even the people who disagreed with him. And after he passed away, *three thousand people* were in his funeral procession. And he is buried beneath the chancel of Trinity Church, New York. Which is fitting for a saint. The chancel in a church is the very center or heart of the churches building, to include the altar area. And as we just discussed, John Henry Hobart may be physically buried beneath a church's chancel, but he is spiritually waiting beneath the heavenly altar. Having poured his life out unto others by surrendering his walk in this life unto Jesus Christ.

It is said that Hobart labored so hard for the Kingdom that his health broke. He suffered from ulcers and fell sick as a result of his all-in devotion. But as it is with surrendered saints, they never see themselves to be saintly, but rather sinners. Hobart in humility upon his death bed besought God's mercy saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And something that he asked to be done for him, I'd like to do today. Upon his death bed, he asked that during the confession, the one we pray on page 360 every single Sunday in our Book of Common Prayer, that there be a pause until he indicated to "go on," after the words "thought, word, and deed." And so today when we pray, "Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you," I would like for us to pause after we say, "in thought," until I say, "go on," and "word" until I say go on, and "deed," until I say go on. So that we have time to reflect after each confession. We can use today, John Henry Hobart, as an example for such sobriety in the confession of our sins.

And for me, what makes Hobart *an example* that I hope to follow is especially one detail in particular. And that is, he exhorted the priest attending to him at his death bed the following saying: "Be sure that in all your preaching the doctrines of the Cross be introduced: no preaching is good for any thing without these." The heart of the Gospel is the cross and the doctrine of what Christ did for us upon the cross. As Paul says to Timothy today: "there is one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all." No preaching be any good apart from pointing to Christ and what Christ did for us upon the cross. Hobart knew this in his core and conveyed this to his priests and bore much fruit for the kingdom. We hand people nothing if we hand them not Christ.

Which has everything to do with our Gospel for today. Today in our Gospel there is a rich man who has a manager, and the manager is squandering the rich man's wealth. The rich man is God, the manager is us, and the wealth is what God has provided for us in Christ Jesus. When the wayward and squandering manager finally realizes, at about the age of fifty-six, that she has been wasting everything that the Rich Man has entrusted her with, she is like: "Oh my goodness, I had better get busy." And so, she goes to the people of Tombstone, and begins to hand them Jesus by presenting to them the forgiveness of their debt. Which only comes through Jesus. What Jesus has done for us on the cross. There is nothing else we can extend to anyone that forgives indebtedness to God save for what Christ has done for us on the cross. And we know that this is what the manager is doing because the debt is one of oil and wheat. Oil represents the Holy Spirit in Scripture, and wheat a mature Christian. Jesus is *the One* who enables the Holy Spirit to indwell us *and* to grow us up into maturity. And so, when the unwise manager sees that by squandering the wealth of the Rich Man in holding his wealth for herself, that she has been harming others, she realizes she had better get busy, and she begins to share the truth about Jesus Christ's forgiveness of debt *and* power towards perfection. God have mercy upon me that I may one day be commended like the manager in our parable, for using God's riches to reduce debt for others. God help each one of us to be faithful in this understanding.

Peter understood this in Acts chapter 3 verse 6. When Peter comes upon a lame man who cannot walk, Peter looks at the person and says: "Silver or gold I do

not have, but what I have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!" Peter has no true wealth to give apart from the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, but in so doing, he reduces the lame man's debt. There is physical lameness and there is spiritual lameness and Jesus alone enables us to walk and grow up into holiness bearing lasting fruit. Because the last thing that we want to say of ourselves as God's people (at any age) in Tombstone, would be the haunting words from Jeremiah this day where God's people are lamenting that: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

"Therefore strengthen your limp hands and weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed." That's Hebrews chapter 12 verses 12 and 13. *Amen.*