

17th Sunday after Pentecost: Lam 1:1-6; Lam 3:19-26; 2 Tim 1:1-14; Lk 17:5-10

***What on earth* are you here for? And some may say to me, “Why, Heather, we are here to worship with one another today, and so why do you ask?” But so let me rephrase the question, because I am actually asking you something much different, specifically, “What are you *here on earth for?*” And some of you may know how to respond to this question, and some of you may not be so certain. And so fortunately, today in our Parable, Jesus tells us *what we are here on earth for*. We are here on earth to be “worthless slaves.” Oh goodie, you may say. Or you may be tempted to walk out. But either way, today Jesus exhorts us to be worthless slaves, and he begins with, “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending the sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table?’” Would you not rather say to him, “Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink.” This is what we are here on earth for. Per Jesus.**

And so today, first of all, Jesus refers to us as slaves. Which is remarkably interesting right off the bat. Given we live in a world where we are told we are entitled to things. The world tells us we are entitled to freedom and to our freedoms. But God says, “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts, (Is 55:8-9). God views our role here on earth much differently than the world does. And God’s ways and thoughts are higher than ours. And so, while the world tells us to advance and move up and have power, today Jesus tells us to be slaves. And of course, being a slave is only good based on who it is that you are enslaved to, and we know that we are to be slaves of the Most High God. This term is actually revealed to us through a female slave in the book of Acts. The female slave is under the influence of an evil divining spirit and yet she knows how to perceive good. She is the one that kept following Paul and the other disciples around shouting, “These men are the slaves of the Highest God, who are telling you the way to be saved,” (Acts 16:16-17). And this is what we are. God’s slaves. And as slaves, this is what we should be doing: telling the way to be saved.

And Jesus reveals this to us today because Jesus in his parable depicts his slaves as plowing and tending sheep. Plowing is something that is done in preparation of sowing seed. And we know that sowing seed in scripture represents the spreading of God's word from the parable of the Sower. Jesus tells his disciples what the parable of the Sower means by beginning with, "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom...this is the seed sown..." To plow and sow seed is to spread the message about God's kingdom. We as God's slaves are to be advancing God's kingdom. And that we are to tend God's sheep as Jesus reveals in the parable means we are to be teaching God's word to God's people. We know this from Jesus' conversation with Peter when Jesus asks, "Peter, do you love me." And Peter answers, "Yes, Lord." And Jesus commands him, "Feed my sheep," (Jn 21:17). We are here to sow God's word, meaning evangelize and bring people to Jesus and then care for them by helping them grow up into mature Christians. Nothing else will affect our culture and our world in a more lasting way.

And Jesus goes on to say, it is not the time for his slaves to sit and take our place at the table but rather to put on our aprons and serve our master food and drink because *later* we may eat and drink. And so not only are we to be about the business of evangelizing and growing one another up into Godliness, but also, we are to be serving our Master, Lord Jesus. Yet Jesus is in heaven and so how do we offer Jesus food and drink? Well, Jesus explains this in Matthew chapter 25 saying: "I was hungry, and you fed me, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink," and Jesus continues on with, "I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home, I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me." We serve our Master, Jesus, by serving others while we are here on earth.

We are not here right now to feast in this lifetime. We learned this from the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus last week. The Rich Man lived for the things of this world and was tormented in the next. And so, Jesus asserts to us today, that we are here in this life to serve. We are here to be obedient slaves of the Most High God – evangelizing and building up the body of believers and ministering to people in need. This is why we are here on earth. We will feast with Jesus later in his Kingdom. Jesus tells us of this saying, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until the day when I drink it anew with you in

My Father's Kingdom." We have a date with Christ Jesus at which time we will feast and drink, but that time is not now, and that place is not here.

When we receive communion, we are doing what Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 11:26 when he says to us: "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." We, in receiving the Bread and the Wine, make a proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes again saying, "We remember his death, We proclaim his resurrection, We await his coming in glory." And we, being united with Jesus in death through the sacrament of baptism, are to live as if crucified also to the world until he comes again. As we will pray today saying: "Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice." We thereby proclaim not only in the bread and the wine, Christ crucified, but with our entire surrendered lives we proclaim Christ crucified in us. By the manner in which we live. Colossians chapter 3 verse 3 affirms to us: "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." This is what it means to pick up our cross daily and follow Jesus. We therefore live as slaves of the Most High God now.

And when we behave as obedient slaves, we are not supposed to be all full of ourselves virtue signaling every good thought and deed out over the internet, but rather we are to view ourselves as Jesus tells us to view ourselves, and I quote, "Worthless slaves." Which seems to be a pretty strict regimen and a very sober self-assessment that Jesus presents to us in his parable for us today. I mean if you were asked what your favorite parable from Jesus is, how many of us would raise our hand and say, "Ooh, ooh – my favorite parable is that of the 'worthless slave!'" In fact, who in their right mind would want to follow Jesus given this regimen that Jesus outlines for us today along with the title of worthless slave? But I say to you, there is nothing that will ever fulfill you more than being used up for God's purpose. And this is because God created us and knows what will fulfill us. And what will fulfill us is not the freedom of the world, but rather slavery to God. This is how Paul can say to us that as God's servant, he is able to live as "having nothing, and yet possessing everything," (2 Cor 6:10). For there is much freedom in being a worthless slave for God.

And yet we know we are not worthless in God's sight. Jesus is using hyperbole in order to jar us into hearing him. And we know this because Jesus tells us not a single sparrow falls to the ground and dies without our Heavenly Father

knowing it and we are far more valuable than sparrows, (Matt 10:29). And we are told by the Apostle Peter, “that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that [we] were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to [us] from [our] ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” We are worth so much to God, God died for us, and should we not in return die for God? Perhaps another translation would be “unworthy slaves” as opposed to worthless. Because I believe that we will, no matter how much we do for the kingdom, always wish that we had done more. We will consider ourselves to be unworthy. Because the more we have a sense of God’s holiness and our high calling to be used for God’s purpose, I believe we will in the next life wish with all our hearts that we had held nothing back. We will have this wish in the next life that we had lived our lives worthy of our high calling *unless* by the power of the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the flesh (Rom 8:13) and in fact hold nothing back as obedient slaves of the Highest God.

Today, the Apostle Paul writes to his beloved child in the faith, Timothy, whom he is encouraging to grow up into maturity and Paul begins with: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the *promise of life* that is in Christ Jesus.” The Apostle Paul knows how to begin a letter. And apostle means “one who is sent.” Paul is proclaiming he is one sent by God, and in this sense, we are all “ones who are sent.” Not by our will, as Paul goes on to explain, but by the will of God. We yield our will to be sent out into the world as God sends us. And we do this for the sake of what Paul next says. We do this for the sake of the “promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.” And what life is that? Well, it cannot be *this life* because Paul is already alive in this life and so is Timothy. Paul is referring to the promised abundant and eternal life. We can live for the things of this life, or we can live as slaves of the Most High God storing up treasure in heaven. The irony being that whoever seeks to save their life will lose it, and as Jesus adds: “Whoever loses their life for my sake and the Gospel will save it,” (Matt 8:35).

And you are free to choose whichever you wish. There is an entire crowd of people that turn away and stop following Jesus right after he tells them they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. Meaning carry his crucified life through application to their own lives in this life, but they do not understand. They

believe him to be a cannibal. Or they *do* understand but they believe the cost to be too high. They consider the cost too high of going to war with the world and they make peace with the world as opposed to making peace with the Most High God. We read this parable four weeks ago in Luke chapter 14 about the decision to either fight the good fight committing everything that we have to following our Lord or selling our souls short by sending a delegation and making a treaty with the world. And right after the crowds decide they are choosing the world and they turn away from following Jesus, right after Jesus says they must eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to be his disciples, Jesus says to his twelve? "Does this offend you? You do not want to leave too, do you?" And Peter answers him: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life," (Jn 6:61, 67-68). There is no one or no thing that we can turn to in this world for eternal life save for Jesus Christ.

When we come forward to receive communion today, are we able to re-commit all that we are to following Lord Jesus through the power of his Spirit and his assurance to us of eternal life, or are we at least able to pray "Lord Jesus, help me?" ... I used to have to pray a very feeble prayer saying, "Lord, help me to want to want to do your will." There is nothing wrong with a completely heartfelt prayer, for God would not want us to do otherwise, and the call to live as a worthless slave is not easy; but when you come forward today, ask yourself, "to whom else shall I go?"

Jesus exhorts us in Luke saying: "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like [slaves] waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks [you] can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have *them* recline at the table and will come and wait on *them*," (Luke 12:35-37). This is the order of things per Lord Jesus. And we have confidence to live as worthless slaves now because our true identities are hidden with Christ in God as heirs of an eternal kingdom. *Amen.*