

Trinity 17

(October 3 – 4, 2009)

Luke 14:1-11, Ephesians 4:1-4

“Walking Worthy in the Blood of the Lamb”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text for today is the Gospel lesson just read, with focus on these words: For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. We will also be examining Ephesians chapter 4, I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness. St. Paul reminds us basically that we are Christians. We have one God, one faith, one baptism. You and I have a bond of peace that is thicker than family. You see, we Christians are more than family. We are in Christ. We have a connection to God and to each other that the world simply does not have. We kneel at the same altar. We receive Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins together, as one church.

This bond, though, doesn't simply go to these four walls. This bond of unity extends to the whole Christian Church throughout all the world. But even more than that, this bond extends to the whole Christian Church of all time. When we commune at this Altar, we are communing with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the saints and apostles and martyrs of all time. We commune with your parents and grandparents, and all the baptized faithful in years past. It is a glorious connection. It is a beautiful thing.

Walk worthy. Be who you are. Don't pretend to be something else. Now the world does not operate on the basis of this unity and peace. No, the peace the world operates with is a dream. It is a peace based on the inherent goodness of mankind, or a peace based on the fact that we can all get along. Their unity is not based on the one thing needful. Their unity and peace is not based on unity in the God of Creation. It may last for a time, but it cannot endure. The unity Paul talks about is different. It is from God Himself.

So if we have a unity and a bond that makes us one with the God of Creation, how

is it that Christians can be so spiteful and mean to each other? That's a painful question, I know. How is it that here at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church we can treat one another as if Christ hadn't died on the cross for all our sins? we are Christians. Act like it. This is what St. Paul is saying. It probably makes your squirm. It should. It does for me.

This is also Jesus' point in the parable of the wedding banquet. When you go to a banquet, Jesus said, don't go sit up in the highest seat and pretend like you're the most important person there. If you do this, you are sure to be put down, and it won't be pleasant. Instead, go and sit at the lowest place, so that when the master of the feast comes, he may lift you up and seat you where He will.

In other words, you have been invited to the wedding banquet. The Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with His gifts, sanctified and kept you in the one true faith. God has done all of these things for you and more. But don't take that gift of salvation and eternal life and use it as an excuse and cover up for evil.

But there's the problem. My sinful nature wants to take this gift of God and flaunt it, and make it seem like this is a gift I deserve. Well, OF COURSE I will receive eternal life and salvation. Look at what a nice person I am! Look at all of the great things that I do for my family and for my church! These other people don't do a thing.

Or think about how things work in the church. We have lots of things going on here at Trinity right now, and we have lots of needs. Now when we're talking about needs, we're talking about people. How do we fix the basement? Do we pave the parking lot? What about the hymnals? What about evangelism? Saturday Organist? Bible Study? Children and youth? The list could go on and on. Our temptation as human beings with these things is to pick our own territory and dig in. This is right and that is wrong and that's that. And if I don't get my way, I'm going to take my toys and go home. I know that's my temptation. Each person in this room has a picture in their head of what they would like to see our congregation be and do in the years to come. I want my seat at the head of the table, and my opinion is more important than anyone else's opinion.

...walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. When we talk about being a Christian, we are talking about a life of service. You see, as Christians we know the pain and weakness that we all face every day. It is very tempting to look at another person and assume that we know the whole story. So-and-so was short tempered

with me, so I'm going to get back at them. This person or that person didn't like what I said, so I'm not going to support them. Instead of covering their sins and weaknesses, we expose them for the world to see.

Think of those words. Lowliness. Gentleness. Longsuffering. Bearing one another in love. Striving to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. What are those words describing? They aren't describing you. They aren't describing me. They are describing none other than Jesus Christ Himself. Walking worthy means believing that Christ is the one who is lowly, longsuffering, who bears our burdens, and who keeps the peace in the Spirit.

We can't do it ourselves. The more you become aware of God's Law and understand its implications, the more you come to realize that you can't do it. If you think you are the perfect Christian, it is because you don't understand God's Law. By the Law we become conscious of sin.

So where is the hope for you and I? Our impatience with each other, our arrogance and pride, our selfishness and short temperedness, all of these things point us to the certainty that as Christians, we fail constantly. Even if we know the right thing to do, we don't do it. Or if we do it, we do it for all the wrong reasons. So where is the hope?

The hope lies in Christ alone. He is the one who healed the man who came to him sick and diseased. He is the one who has called you to His banquet feast. He is the one who is longsuffering with our sin-sickness. He is the one who can give you the peace that the world cannot give. St. Paul is describing Christ Himself, and Christ's attitude toward you. He is longsuffering, He is lowly, He bears your burdens and sins. That is the point.

And how do we receive this work of God in Christ? What is our solution? How do we get out of this quandary of sin and get on with the work of Christ's Church? The answer lies in the banquet. We come to the Lord's Table, to His great banquet in order to receive forgiveness of all our sins. He forgives your sins. He knows your weaknesses better than you know yourself. And it is for those sins that He died. That is what it means to be washed in the blood of the lamb.

The only way to walk worthy is to trust in Christ alone. He alone is worthy. And He gives this to you as a free gift by water and the Spirit, and continues to seal you in that gift of salvation in His own body and blood.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.