

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost, Sunday, October 12, 2014 Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-6, Luke 14:1-11

“You Are Worth It!”

Last week – we were reminded by the Lord to do two things – to love and to obey. When Jesus was asked by the young lawyer which one of God's Laws were greatest, the Lord said that we must love the Lord God with all of ourselves, and then we MUST love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. An amazing thing that I have discovered – is that this is a very difficult thing in today's day and age – and it is not necessarily because of our neighbor – but because there are a lot of people who have trouble really loving themselves. Looking in the mirror can be a difficult task for some folks, while others really like what they see, and that is just fine, but for the ones who struggle with who they are – we need to pray. Think of the words from the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray – He told us to ask God to “*forgive us our trespasses or ‘debts’ as we forgive those who trespass against us – or as we forgive our debtors.*” These prayers walk hand in hand with “*love your neighbor as yourself.*” How can you love others or forgive others if you don't love or forgive yourself? There are, believe it or not, people who are carrying around things that they have done in their life that they just cannot forgive themselves for. They have a terrible feeling of self-worth – a terrible self-image.

The Apostle Paul speaks to us through his letters - and to the church especially in Ephesians. He reminds us that God has put a call on our lives – and that doesn't necessarily mean that it is to be ordained – it may mean a call here at St. Andrew's, or even in your home or workplace - working for His kingdom. Over the past week, and during my earlier visits to St. Andrew's, during our time of discernment – I have gotten to see a group of people, from all walks of life, who are dedicated to touching others with God's Word. It reminds me of the words that are often credited to St. Francis of Assisi: “***Preach the Gospel always – and if necessary – use words!***” At all times we need to care for one another – and to let Christ's light shine in us.

Jesus will never let anything stand in the way of His showing just how important we are to Him; just how important YOU are to Him. In His eyes you are worth it all! In today's Holy Gospel – Jesus was on His way to dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee – a leader of the Temple. It was the Sabbath – in Hebrew that is “Shabbat” – and the Jewish people are required to do absolutely no work on the Sabbath. They are really serious about this – and today if you are in a hotel in Israel - beginning on Friday night, through sundown Saturday, they set aside a special elevator in that hotel in which every button for every floor is lit – and if you get on this elevator – you avoid the “work” of pushing a button. You get on and stop at every floor! Not good if you are in a rush,

The Pharisees of Jesus' day would have seen healing as work and so Jesus asked them “*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?*” It seems to me that they were setting Him up by not answering Him – and so they could, and would later on, use this as one of the pieces of evidence to have Him crucified – working on the Sabbath. As I said – Jesus will never let anything stand in the way of doing what is right for the benefit of His people – even putting Himself in jeopardy. Jesus healed the man and sent him on his way. The Lord tried to get them

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to break their silence on the issue by asking *“If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?”* They still would not say anything. Not a peep! Their trap was set and they would later make good on it.

Jesus desires for each one of us to feel valued – and to, in essence, “love ourselves,” but not to the extent that we feel or act more haughty or privileged than others. He gives us the example: the wedding feast and the person who goes to the place of honor - only to be taken down a peg by the host - one throwing the feast – and making that person go to the other end of the table. Talk about embarrassing! Apparently at the dinner feast that Jesus was attending He noticed some political positioning taking place. I think we have all witnessed that to some extent. There is a difference between feeling good about yourself and putting yourself up above and over everyone. Jesus put it this way. *“For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”* Jesus sees the heart and not the position or seating place. Humility is something we all need to have.

Jesus wants everyone to feel good about themselves, and to have Him in their lives. I am sure many of you have heard this Scripture from Matthew 11:28-30 where Jesus makes an invitation to us with open arms. He says *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

The words *“weary and burdened”* say it all. You might have heard the words *“heavy laden”* and that is the same as burdened. In actuality - those who consider themselves far from perfect are really on Jesus’ “A-list!” People who cannot see themselves as worthy or even good – but instead when they look in the mirror they see tarnished silver, chipped china, a dented can or fender – seeing themselves as **“damaged goods”** - are so precious and of great worth to Jesus. Jesus is asking anyone who is tired of carrying around shame for things that they have done in the past, things they don’t want anyone to EVER know about; who are feeling guilt for actions – or even feeling that there is nothing that they can do to erase their past – or are never feeling good enough or able to do enough to gain heaven – Jesus wants them to drop their shame, their guilt, their hurt and pain and come to Him. Jesus knows what it is like to be human – and so He asks you to simply come – turn away from whatever has us feeling less than worthy – and come. His invitation is unconditional just as is His promise to provide rest. He is offering rest – coverage, protection and a relationship with Him – *“rest for your soul.”* Jesus is offering the fulfillment of Jeremiah 6:16 to find *“where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.”* Jesus, who is *“the way, and the truth, and the life”* (John 14:6) is offering perfect rest – eternal rest - not just for your broken, tired body – but for your spirit – for your soul! Isn’t that Good News? Jesus’ rest covers all of the things that we have been conditioned to think make us unworthy to even go near Him. His rest gives us new eyes to see ourselves as He sees us – **of great value!**

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In Matthew 10:29-31 Jesus asked *"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."* Understand this - **God doesn't make mistakes** and He made us in His image and likeness: *"God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;'"* (Genesis 1:26) *"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* (Genesis 1:27) **Mankind was made in the image and likeness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit** – God proclaimed **"Our image"** and despite the presence of sin in our lives – in which Adam and Eve marred the image of God within themselves, passing that damaged likeness on to all of their descendants. (Romans 5:12). In spite of ourselves, today, we still bear the image of God (James 3:9), but we also bear the scars of sin.

The good news is that when God redeems someone – and they hear His call, He begins to restore the original image *"and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."* (Ephesian 4:24) That redemption is only available by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, our Messiah. He calls us to be renewed from the sin that separates us from God. The Apostle Paul reminds us *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."* **It is through Christ – not by our own works** – meaning that **there is nothing that we can do to earn heaven!** Any tarnished image that we see or feel is transformed by our belief and faith in Jesus through Christ, and we are made new creations in the likeness of God. *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."* (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

Jesus' invitation to us is far more than meets the eye! Jesus offers to teach us as well, taking His yoke and submitting to Him, the One who is gentle, meek, caring and concerned for us. He is not just giving us a job to do – or outfit us with a yoke – to work alone as His follower – but Jesus promises to be right by our side! And He will never leave us or forsake us. At the end of the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28:20 Jesus promised *"and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

In closing, I want to share with you, what for me, is one of the most encouraging statements in all of Holy Scripture. The Apostle Paul writes these encouraging words: *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."* When we make the decision to stop turning our backs on God – which is really what we do when we sin, and turn back to Him –repentance – then Jesus frees us from the shackles of sin that bind us. When we are in

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relationship with Jesus then “*there is no condemnation.*” There is no need for us to continue to carry any guilt or shame, pain, doubts, or fear – for God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has freed us. Just as we made a profession of faith in accepting Jesus as Savior, we need to accept the gift that He gives us in His rest – “*because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.*” (1John 4:4) One more thing – He wants you to know that you are worth it all!