

Sermon, Father William J. Albinger

July 29, 2007

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost - Proper 12C 2007

In the Name of our one living God, who creates abundantly, loves extravagantly and sustains eternally – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As you know, we have been on a journey. A month ago, Jackie took Mark and me and the cat to the airport at Kapalua where we flew to Honolulu and then onto Newark and the drive up to our farm in the Berkshires. We had a great rest there and this past Wednesday, we retraced our steps to back home here in Lahaina. I imagine many of you have been on journeys, also, and I look forward to catching up. However, we have also been on a common journey together both in Lahaina and Massachusetts – we have each Sunday been following Jesus in Luke’s Gospel as Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem”. I’d like to recap that journey briefly so we can move forward together.

First, let’s remember where we find Jesus. He is not in Church! He is not at home! He is out in the world and on the road where the people are. We saw that he met with rejection and disappointment – a Samaritan village rejected his emissaries and those that did seem to want to follow him all seemed to have excuses – good excuses mind you – why they had to delay on the follow through. Jesus’ teaching is that when it comes to being called to be a disciple, delay is just another way of saying no.

Jesus is not deterred but, rather, is determined. He then sends 70 disciples out in teams. Notice he doesn’t send them home nor to the temple – but out into the world to

other villages, places they haven't been before, to people they don't yet know. He tells them their job is simply to tell the Good News and to accept and not be upset by rejection, but to travel on. He tells them to be with the people, to accept their hospitality, to live and eat like they do. He tells them to heal the sick and to tell them that God's kingdom has come near to them. When they later rejoice in their successes and of their newfound powers, Jesus tells them that it isn't about them – it is about God working God's healing power through them. REJOICE, Jesus says, not in your power and authority because that is God's – rejoice, instead, that God has called you to do God's work.

Along the way, Jesus met a lawyer who, with some confidence, asks the big question – "What do I have to do to have eternal life?" Upon Jesus' questioning, the guy shows he knows the law – "love God totally above all and love your neighbor as yourself." Now the guy was a good lawyer and he wanted to set some sensible limits on this love thy neighbor stuff. He asks, "Who exactly is my neighbor?" Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Now not only does this parable teach about what most people probably know something about – what it means to help out someone in need, to respond with compassion and help and to give of our time and resources to give them comfort and help – but Jesus throws in two new twists to this lesson on hospitality and compassion. The first is that **nothing**, not our social or ecclesiastical position in life, not even the biblical purity laws, is more important than showing compassion and God's love to another person. The second is that you don't have to belong to the right religion or group or club to do this. In Jesus' parable, the man who succeeded in doing God's will was the Samaritan – despised as a heretic and considered religiously impure by the Jews at the time – and not the priest or the Levite who were probably on their way to gather with the right sort of people in the right

Temple and didn't want to touch someone the law said would make them ritually impure.

Next, Jesus in his travels stops by the home of his friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, just outside of Jerusalem in Bethany. Here we get another lesson in hospitality. Jesus is teaching in the living room and Mary is sitting at his feet listening while sister Martha is hustling in the kitchen getting the food and drink ready for her guests. Finally, she gets fed up and asks Jesus, "Don't you care that I am slaving away in the kitchen while good ol' Mary is lally gagging at your feet here?" Jesus then gives another lesson in hospitality: It isn't enough to work hard and throw a good party; you have to have the right motivation and know **why** you are doing it. In other words, doing is only part of being; hospitality is part of ministry and mission. Again, the Gospel gives this lesson a new twist. What was Mary doing there at Jesus' feet listening to him teaching in the first place? In Jewish culture of that day women weren't at the teacher's feet; men were. Women were supposed to be in the kitchen. Here Jesus says learning about God and the love of God is for everyone.

In this Sunday's Gospel, Luke has Jesus answering his disciples question about another characteristic of discipleship – prayer. They ask for a prayer like John the Baptist taught his disciples. But Jesus again does it with a twist. He doesn't give them a magic incantation. Instead he teaches about the nature of God and our relationship with God in the form of prayer. We sometimes say the Lord's Prayer by rote, but it really is a prayer that Jesus intended to draw us into reflection about the nature of God and the relationship between God and humanity. How do we address God – what is the nature of the relationship? Names matter. For Jesus and his disciples, God is not a tyrant, not a judge ready to trip us up at the first infraction; nor is God room service – someone you call when we need something or to cater to our every whim and fancy.

God is to be addressed as a caring, wise and loving parent. A parent is attentive and hears the child and gives the child what the child truly needs. Jesus assures his listeners that God is indeed attentive to our true needs. Jesus reinforces this lesson with a parable. If a person needs bread to meet his obligation of hospitality to a visitor and pounds on his neighbor's door in the middle of the night to ask for it, Jesus assures us that eventually the neighbor will get up and respond – if only to avoid being shamed or to stop the racket. Jesus reminds us that if a cranky neighbor will answer a request eventually (no matter how irritably), how much more so will our God and Creator answer us quickly and with concern.

The truth is that no matter how well things may be going, we all are in need of God's care. The universe can change on a dime – we acknowledge this reality when we pray for our daily bread and for God's forgiveness and protection.

Jesus teaches us to pray relationally. Ours is not only a God who opens, answers and can be found, but also a God who asks, seeks and knocks. The Lord's Prayer reminds us not only of the nature of our relationship with God but also of our relationships with one another that flow out of the love of our common Creator.

The "Our Father" is not an incantation; it is not magic. It is a reminder that our relationship with God and God's with us is all about trust, caring, hospitality, and pouring out that love to others.

Amen.