

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 14:1-11

As I was meditating on our Gospel text, a totally unrelated verse of Scripture grabbed my attention. I'm sure this has happened to you if you spend any time contemplating the Bible. In the verse I was struck with, Paul is writing to the Corinthians after his visits them:

2 Corinthians 11:3 (NKJV)

3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the *simplicity* that is in Christ.

"The simplicity that is in Christ" captured my attention. If you are more familiar with the NIV or the ESV it translates "simplicity" as sincere. The Greek word here can be translated as either "simplicity" or "sincere." Either is correct. They both read about the same, but there is a difference. I'm glad I read it in the NKJV because the simplicity captured my attention. When you think about it, we have a really simple Faith. Now I do not mean easy, but I do mean simple.

Consider our Catechism. The catechism proper is really quite small and simple. You have, 1) The Ten Commandments, 2) The Apostle's Creed, 3) The Lord's Prayer, 4) Holy Baptism, 5) The Office of the Keys or Confession and Absolution, 6) The Lord's Supper, 7) Daily Prayers, and 8) The Table of Duties. All parts are derived *directly* from Scripture. When you compare it to other confessions, like the Roman Catholic one or the Presbyterian one, ours is quite simple. And that is a good thing. It really is that simple. And I love how Paul puts it: "the simplicity that is in Christ."

But, as I've said, simple doesn't mean easy. There are many things that make our Christian Faith difficult. The first is original sin which we're all born with. We kick and fight and spit and scream against God and His kingdom as soon as we are conceived. Now granted, a 40-year-old can spit and scream a lot more than a baby in the womb or an infant in the crib.

Although, to be fair, a certain red-head infant could have a glorious melt down when she didn't get her way. I'm talking about Jill, my daughter, in case you didn't catch that reference. Her temper tantrums didn't happen that often, but when they did, they were a sight to behold! It's not so cute with a 40-year-old. Consider the misguided women that "shout" their abortion. They aren't mad at me, even though I'm white, male, and generally conservative, but they are shouting at God who made them with a womb. We must be converted by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God before we become a friend of God. But I don't think this is the problem with the Pharisees in our Gospel reading today.

Another thing that could make our Faith difficult instead of simple is ignorance. We could be brought up to believe in modernity, secularism, and feminism and be blind to the goodness of God. By modernity, I mean that someone has bought into the idea that the only thing that exists is the material which doesn't allow for God and His kingdom. By secularism, I mean that someone has bought into the idea that we can fix our own problems if we only trusted government and scientism more. Notice I use "scientism" and not "science." Let the hearer understand. By feminism, I mean that someone has bought into the idea that there is no difference between men and women and a woman should be able to do anything she wants even if she doesn't naturally want it. The small percentage of women in scientific fields is not due to a failure of teaching STEM subjects, but because women generally aren't wired that way. And that is a good thing! And this buy in to modernity, secularism, and feminism seems excessive in our time. But I also don't think this is the problem with the Pharisees in our Gospel reading today.

The other way we make Faith hard is by adding to it. Read Leviticus. Do you really want to add laws to that? Some did. And the number was 613. The Pharisees added 613 laws to the Law of God because they took the Law seriously in one sense and too lightly in another sense.

In one sense, they took the Law of God so seriously, they didn't even want to come close to breaking it. They reasoned that if they kept these 613 laws, they wouldn't break the Ten Commandments. It's kind of like that idea that if you don't have any beer in the house, you won't drink any.

Although, to be technical, it's not a sin to drink beer. It's a sin to drink too much beer. They cared about God's Law and wanted to be hypervigilant in applying it to their lives. If you've heard of blue laws which are rampant in the so-called Bible belt, you know what I'm talking about. You can't dance, play cards, or drink on Sunday or it's a sin! But this highlights the other problem. The Pharisees and Bible-belt believers don't understand the full force of the law.

When we become a Christian, God doesn't lessen or remove the commandments. Actually, we are supposed to take them more seriously because we have the new man and the Holy Spirit. But we're never to have the illusion, this side of glory, that we keep the commandments. But a Pharisee and Bible-belt believer actually think they keep the law. They think they keep the 5th commandment even though they regularly hate someone in their heart or call them a fool with their lips. That's the whole point of the sermon on the mount... we can't keep God's law! Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees and it does not and cannot... we need a savior! As Paul says, "who will save me from this body of death?" He meant his own body which was full of death due to sin! We are all in this condition and need Jesus. Just like the Pharisees in today's Gospel.

Jesus doesn't just eat with sinners and tax collectors, but He also eats with Pharisees! And not just any Pharisee but a leader of the Pharisees. And Jesus loves them just as much as He loves sinners and tax collectors and just as much as He loves you and me. He wants them to repent of their hardness of hearts and receive mercy and His righteousness. So Jesus taunts them. That may not sound loving to us, but He's trying to break through their hardness of hearts.

The Pharisees are torqued at Jesus because He healed on the Sabbath and claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath and claimed to forgive sins. So the Pharisees that have Jesus over to eat on the Sabbath are already mad at Him and “watching Him carefully.” (v. 1) So what does Jesus do? He calls a sick guy over and heals Him on the Sabbath right in front of their faces. It’s like He said to one of His apostles, “Hold my beer.” To top it off, He shames them, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” (v. 5) To do something good for someone in need wasn’t unlawful on the Sabbath. Regular work was outlawed, but emergencies happen, and the people of God were free to help others on the Sabbath. Not so, according to the Pharisees. Your lack of work on the Sabbath was meant as a show to others so they could see how righteous you were. Lord, save us from such self-righteousness!

And Jesus doesn’t stop there. He points out their hypocrisy about sitting in a particular place. He’s mocking them to their face. But He finishes with a statement that the Pharisees and we must deal with: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” We all must be humbled by the Word of God so that we will be exalted to live by His side “in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” (LSC) All who are not humbled in this life will continually be humbled in their next life apart from God!

And remember, it really is simple.

First, we humble ourselves through the Ten Commandments. There are only ten of them. To be fair, each commandment has a lot of facets, but there are still only ten commandments. Our problem is that we don’t want to follow them in our old man. Have you heard the phrase, “the heart wants what the heart wants?” That’s a popular sentiment these days. It’s merely an excuse to ignore the sixth commandment. The problem isn’t the sixth commandment, but our rebellion against it. Our old Adam really must be drowned in our baptismal waters daily!

Second, we humble ourselves through the Apostle's Creed. We sit back and marvel at what our God has done for us. Our old man despises the work of God on its behalf, but the new man delights in the works of God. Only when we understand how much God has done for us, do we understand how free we are in Him.

Third, we speak like a Christian. In other words, we pray the perfect prayer our Lord taught us to pray. Our old man does everything he can to keep us from praying constantly. We have a constant need for prayer and do not turn to it enough! Consider that almighty God promises to hear you directly! How incredible is that?

Fourth, we return to our Baptism daily. God washes us clean and continues to wash us clean with this very simple act of water and Word.

Fifth, we enjoy the gift of private confession or absolution that God gives to us. No matter how secure we are in our faith, the devil sure loves to attack us with previous sin. The healing balm of absolution spoken against a particular sin is a powerful antidote to the attacks of the devil and his minions.

Sixth, we regularly partake of God's heavenly meal that keeps us firm in the faith until we die. We are all sojourners on a journey from death to life eternal and God provides holy sustenance for our journey.

Seventh, we pray not only the Lord's Prayer, but other prayers that have been handed down by our church and our families. Our daily life is centered around prayer. We pray in the morning, before mealtime, and before bedtime, and even other times.

Eighth, we are taught by the table of duties how to act within the three estates of life where God has placed us.

As we move through the realms of family, church, and the economic sphere, we are given marching orders so that these realms work smoothly. And when they work well, our cities, states, and nations work well also.

It really is that simple. Yet we like to make it difficult just like the Pharisees before us. Thank God for His Word. Through God's Word, He reveals Jesus, our Savior, to us, He instructs us, He refreshes us, and He comforts us. Most importantly, God protects you from the crafty devil and his deceitfulness so that you remain in the simplicity of Christ.

Then we have the same answer to Paul's important question, "who will save me from this body of death" as he does: "Jesus Christ our Lord!"

To Him be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.