

Sermon for June 7th, 2026
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 15:1-6

1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” **2** But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” **3** And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” **4** And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” **5** And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” **6** And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Psalm 33:12-22

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!
13 The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees all the children of man;
14 from where he sits enthroned he looks out
on all the inhabitants of the earth,
15 he who fashions the hearts of them all
and observes all their deeds.
16 The king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
17 The war horse is a false hope for salvation,
and by its great might it cannot rescue.
18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
19 that he may deliver their soul from death
and keep them alive in famine.
20 Our soul waits for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield.
21 For our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.
22 Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.

1 John 4:13-21

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. **16** So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. **17** By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. **18** There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. **19** We love because he first loved us. **20** If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. **21** And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Luke 16:19-31

19 “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Our text for meditation this First Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Assurance and its Detractors

How do you know you are saved? If someone says with confidence that he knows he's going to Heaven, we say that such a man has *assurance* of salvation. He is not afraid of Judgment Day, with a confidence before our God that he will live eternally upon the great Day of Resurrection. Now, this assurance I speak of is not just a state of being: it is something we are *commanded* to have. The author of Hebrews binds our consciences to it, saying that we ought to have “the full assurance of hope until the end.”¹ Later on, he states it more strongly, “let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance* of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”² Being assured of one's salvation is not negotiable. If we are to call ourselves Christians, we must know that we are saved. St. John tells us in our reading “whoever fears has not been perfected in love,” meaning there is something *deficient* in the man who does not have this assurance.

“But how are we supposed to do that?” you might wonder. It sometimes feels like everything out there is intended to tell us we are damned no matter how much we believe the Gospel. The denominations that deny justification by faith alone open up the possibility that believers simply have not done enough, have not confessed enough, and have not perfected themselves to such a point that they could enter Heaven. Anyone who takes that notion seriously will be worried sick their entire lives, for if we are being honest then we must confess that we sin every day. What can a mere man do to satisfy the demands of an infinite God, especially when we all fail Him every day?

Even if someone joins one of the magisterial denominations believing he can earn his justification and thus have assurance, then the institutional problem rears its head. You see my friends, while Rome and the orthodox both claim to be the one true holy and Apostolic church, at various times and places they have anathematized one another (as well as us Protestants). Admittedly, Rome is better

1 Hebrews 6:11

2 Hebrews 10:22

about this than they used to be, but there is still fierce debate about whether a Protestant or orthodox can be saved. Meanwhile most orthodox pronounce everyone but them to be damned. So if a man is prone to worrying over his salvation, in these churches he will find himself reeling over the thousands of hours that the magisterials have taken to make their cases, plus all the exclusionary competitive claims over which visible church gets the biggest share of Heaven.

This isn't me just beating up on the Catholics or Orthodox though, as being *Protestant* doesn't help us either when it comes to assurance. Many Protestant denominations have severe problems when it comes to assurance of salvation, most notably the calvinistic ones. The reformed teach that salvation depends on whether you are one of the elect, those whom God “predestined for salvation” for no discernible reason before the world was even created. In their conception of things, our Lord wrote up a decree and a list of names was on it that said “saved:” everyone else is damned, also for no discernible reason.³ The tricky thing is, no one knows for sure whether they are elect according to calvinist theology, because this farcical “decree” belongs to the secret counsel of God. So if someone asks how he can know he is saved their typical answer to the question of assurance is “work harder.” Do more works, believe harder, feel more pious, and then maybe by a process of emotional alchemy you can think you are saved...maybe. Calvin *also* formulated a doctrine called “evanescent grace” wherein God supposedly tricks someone into thinking they believe the Gospel so that He can damn them harder.⁴ So if someone holds to calvinistic doctrines of salvation, he has no way of knowing whether he is saved or not, and because of their “limited atonement” doctrine which denies the universal Atonement, they cannot know whether Jesus even died for them.⁵ Sadly, much of institutional “Confessional Lutheranism” has accepted the calvinistic frame regarding predestination, and so ends up with the same problem. Hundreds of millions of Christians, across every tradition there is, having to struggle with a creeping despair and the terror of thinking they might not be saved. And their denominations are actively tempting them to violate this command to take hold of the solace of assurance.

Gaining Assurance

So what is a Christian to do to get this assurance that Scripture so commands? It seems that we will not find the assurance of salvation with the theologians, denominations, or confessional documents. While these institutions can provide fantastic resources for learning deeper doctrinal truths, they are completely worthless when it comes to helping men obey the basic command to know one is saved. Therefore, we must go to the source of the commandment – the Word of God, plainly understood – to find our answer. With our reading, St. John provides it. Here are the basic things that we must acknowledge in order to know we are going to Heaven.

Baptism

St. John says “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” To abide in God is to be saved, and to have the Holy Spirit is to abide in God. How do we receive the Holy Spirit? His indwelling presence is promised in Baptism. As St. Peter says, “Repent and be Baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of

3 Some calvinistic theologians claim that damnation is justified, because God damns sinners for their sins (which they believe He predetermined would happen), while forgiving those who He chose to be Christians (despite having committed many such similar sins as was predetermined in their own case). All this does is tell us that God would, if election works the way they say it does, damn some and save others for no discernible reason.

4 I'm not making this up. You can read more here:
http://www.examiningcalvinism.com/files/Articles/Evanescent_Grace.html

5 As an aside, it baffles me how they could even preach, if these men were consistent with their theology; if only regenerate men are supposed to preach, but no one knows whether they are regenerate, the calvinistic pastor really ought to just go behind the pulpit and shrug every Sunday. But I digress.

your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ From the moment you are Baptized, you can trust that the third Person of the Trinity is always with you, that you are forgiven of your sins, and you have eternal life.

Faith

Now, we know that there are false christs out there and deadly heresies which threaten even the comfort of Baptism, so St. John says “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” To abide in Christ is to be saved, and to confess the true Christ is to abide in Christ. As St. Paul says in Romans, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”⁷

Love

By love, St. John means *Agape*, seeking the good of others for their own sake and expecting nothing in return. St. John says “whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” This is the last step my friends. *After* you take comfort in the promises delivered to you in Baptism, and *after* you assert the holy and true faith in Christ Jesus our Crucified and Risen Lord, *then* you can examine yourself and your behavior. The kind of self-examination here is not done to find fault with ourselves and inspire greater fear, but to cheerfully verify the results of the previous promises we looked to from the Word. A man who is Baptized should expect the Holy Spirit to inspire greater works of love over time; a man who believes in the infinite mercies poured out with Christ's Blood on the Cross should expect that he will not hate his brother for whom Christ died. If he examines himself and finds himself *lacking* in these things, his sins are what is producing the fear – not that he is damned, but that sin produces fear, and it must be addressed by confession and absolution to remove that fear.

Conclusion

It is as simple as this my friends. Are you a Baptized believer in Christ? Then Jesus Himself says you are saved, as He tells the Apostles “whoever believes and is Baptized will be saved.”⁸ Every time we confess the Nicene Creed, that wonderful expression of the Gospel, we verify that we belong to God and are on our way to eternal life – so long as one *means* it when they make this confession. When we recognize this, then we may safely take up the full assurance which says “I am saved.” *Then* we go about checking the quality of our character and deeds, that we may either rejoice in what our Lord has done with us, or ask for His help and forgiveness where we are messing up – and all of this while still having that complete confidence that we are Heavenbound.

Someone might ask, “what about the future? How do I know I will *remain* saved?” Ah, but my friend you must focus on the present comfort and assurance. Christ tells us “do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.”⁹ If you know that you are saved, then let Jesus take care of the future and entrust yourself to Him; we receive this promise of His preserving power when we participate in the Sacrament of the Altar – yet another means by which He soothes our consciences and tells us He shall be the unwavering guardian of our souls. Let us be at peace and at ease my friends.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

6 Acts 2:38

7 Romans 10:9-10

8 Mark 16:16

9 Matthew 6:34

Sermon for June 14th, 2026
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Proverbs 9:1-10

- 1** Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.
- 2** She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.
- 3** She has sent out her young women to call
from the highest places in the town,
- 4** “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”
To him who lacks sense she says,
- 5** “Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
- 6** Leave your simple ways, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”
- 7** Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,
and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.
- 8** Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you;
reprove a wise man, and he will love you.
- 9** Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;
teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
- 10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Psalm 34:12-22

- 12** What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?
- 13** Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- 14** Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.
- 15** The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.
- 16** The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
- 17** When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
- 18** The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.
- 19** Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
- 20** He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.
- 21** Affliction will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
- 22** The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Ephesians 2:11-22

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— **12** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Luke 14:12-24

12 He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. **13** But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, **14** and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

15 When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” **16** But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. **17** And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ **18** But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ **19** And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ **20** And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ **21** So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ **22** And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ **23** And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. **24** For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Ironically, our Lord Jesus has this conversation while at a banquet, a dinner hosted by a rich Pharisee.¹ Whether the particular rich man invited Him to this dinner out of curiosity, hostile investigation or true appreciation, we will never know in this life. He could have been like Nicodemus, a secret believer who wanted to learn at Christ's feet. He could have been like the Pharisees who hounded Jesus with trick questions and slanderous accusations. St. Luke does not give us a name to investigate or follow up, so the events and conversations are the main focus. One thing is for certain though, that the man who invited Christ to the banquet shall never forget it.

¹ Luke 14:1

Christ spent the entire evening causing a stir among these wealthy and pious Jews. The first thing He does is publicly heal a man, which they believed was prohibited on the Sabbath, and then He lectures them on why their belief is wrong.² Then He criticizes those who were sitting in honored seats, exhorting them to be more humble.³ Finally, when we arrive at today's reading, He looks the Pharisee who invited Him – right in the eye – and tells him he invited the wrong people. The man *should have* invited all the poor, the dejected, and the disabled, instead of all of his honorable associates, and from now on he should change the invitation list. Imagine the next day my friends, Jesus would be the only topic that anyone who went to that dinner would have talked about!

Jesus undoubtedly caused a big stir with His discussions. Some of the Pharisees would be enraged, saying that He was a bad house-guest: “He spent the whole night offending and criticizing us, after getting all this free food and drink! How ungrateful!” they might say. On the other hand there would be people who *loved* what Jesus did and said. After all, Jesus confronting these aristocratic know-it-all Pharisees with their greed, overbearing commandments and fake piety was one of the reasons large crowds were always following Him. *Someone* had to say what He said, and He was the only one brave enough to do it!

Whatever the social circumstances, the controversy was a result of Jesus being *right*. Everyone knew that healing on the Sabbath should be permitted. Everyone knows deep down that scrambling for the seats of honor is sinful and arrogant. And more importantly, everyone knew that caring for the poor – something the Pharisees were notoriously neglectful about – is a necessity for those with means.

Generosity and the Kingdom of God

One of the most telling moments in our Gospel reading is when a man says “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Jesus had just finished telling the ruler who invited Him that his next banquets should be held for the poor, lame, and blind. But in response this man decides to comment on theology, on the blessedness of people who receive eternal life. While certainly he is correct to say that everyone who eats bread in the Kingdom will be blessed, we ought to ask, *why did he say it?* Here he was, sitting in his wealth and luxury, bringing up theology while Jesus is exhorting everyone to charity. It is as though he were to say, “God will feed them in Heaven, so I am not concerned.”

What a callous, heartless answer – and shame on the rich man for thinking he could get away with it! As if the poor should just idly wait for their meals and shelter until they receive them in Heaven, while he gets to go to fancy banquets. Thankfully, our Savior sees right through his fake piety and does not let him get away with it. He addresses the man *individually* with the Parable we read. It is directly aimed at him, and by extension all men like him.

The Parable begins with a banquet much like the one they were attending, only *bigger*. A “great banquet,” Christ calls it. Many are invited and they all accept the invitation, but every last one of them backs out of actually attending. Their excuses for renegeing? A field that can wait. Oxen that can wait. A wife that can go with to the banquet or wait at home. Every one of them excuses himself for something that does not have to happen, going back on their word over something trivial. The only conclusion we can reach about such men is that they are reaching for excuses because they didn't want to go in the first place.

The banquet in the Parable represents the Kingdom of God, and the men who excuse themselves represent those rich men and Pharisees. Oh they were invited to the Kingdom, they know that very well. After all, most rabbis at this time were Pharisees, and they comprised what we would call the “theologians” of their day. Add in the common understanding that the rich were blessed by God with their material wealth, and it is even clearer. These men have been *invited* to the Kingdom of God, they *know* about the Kingdom of God, and yet they refuse to *enter* the Kingdom because they prefer

2 Luke 14:1-6

3 Luke 14:7-11

their frivolous pursuits.

In the Parable, the men who back out of the invitation are not permitted to come back. Instead, the master of the house invites the poor, crippled, blind and lame. These are the very people that the Pharisee wanted to ignore. In this way, Christ indeed confirms that the people he is neglecting will be blessed in the Kingdom of Heaven just as he said, but they will enter the Kingdom *to replace him*. He will be shut out of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, forever rejected because he first rejected Christ and those for whom Christ cares.

God is the Defender of the widow and the orphan.⁴ These did not receive good things in their lives, having to deal with greater misery than others. It is no wonder that the Parable shows these getting the invitation first. After all, Christ says elsewhere that some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last.⁵ Whoever among the poor and disadvantaged receives the free offer of salvation in Christ will have infinitely more than enough to make up for their suffering here on this earth. If they lacked riches, God will make them wealthy. If they lacked strength or mobility or sight, our Lord will grant these to them in glorious fashion. If they should have been honored, they will be honored throughout eternity.

Now my friends, let us make something clear. Poor people are not automatically saved, and God does not shut the gates of Heaven for those who have wealth. For that matter, the poor are not the only ones who are rewarded in Heaven either. In fact, at the conclusion of the Parable the master of the house says to his servant, “Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.” This is to say, everyone is invited. After Christ went to the Cross and especially after Pentecost, all men are drawn by His witness, that they may be brought to the faith.⁶ This means that the only people who are damned are those who, like the guests who turned back on their invitations, decide that their personal pursuits are more important than what God wants for them.

If you enjoy great riches in this world, do not expect that you shall remain so at the Resurrection. Certainly there are men like Abraham who were very rich and are still rich in the next life, enjoying eternal honor and rewards from our Lord. If you want to be rewarded in the hereafter the same way, then be generous and charitable to those less fortunate than you. This is the message that Christ gives the Pharisee who invited Him to the dinner, and it rings true for everyone today. If you give, then God will give to you. He may choose to do this in this life, He may choose to do it in eternity, but either way He will make sure that your generosity to others is paid back to you with far more than you ever gave. For to show generosity and charity to the poor is to show them the character of our Lord, who generously and charitably offered salvation to us poor sinners in the first place.

Conclusion

At the end, one more caveat. Jesus tells that ruler of the Pharisees that he must invite the poor, blind and lame *instead* of his rich friends and family. This commandment applies to that man alone. If you want to have a banquet for just your friends and family, feel free to do so for it is not a sin in the slightest. But the larger commandment here, to be charitable, *is* a universal command that applies to us today. God has blessed whoever has wealth here in this world. If that is you, then good! But for your soul's sake, turn around and be a blessing to others as well. For the men reading this who do that, may God show you the fantastic rewards He has in store for you. For those who have not done so, my friend please consider joining those saints who will be honored for their charity upon the Last Day. You have nothing to fear my friend, for our Lord will not leave you destitute.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁴ Psalm 68:5

⁵ Luke 13:30

⁶ John 12:32

Sermon for June 21st, 2026
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Micah 7:18-20

18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?

He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in steadfast love.

19 He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.

You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.

20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers
from the days of old.

Psalm 103:1-13

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,

3 who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,

4 who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

5 who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13 As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, **13** though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, **14** and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. **17** To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 15:1-10

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. **2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” **3** So he told them this parable: **4** “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ **7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. **8** “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? **9** And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ **10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Our text for meditation this Third Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Savior's Personality

When we think about the personality of Jesus, a few things come to mind pretty quickly when we read from this passage and the rest of the Gospels. He is compassionate, loving, zealous, and He always knows exactly what to say. Jesus isn't afraid to speak harsh truths, but He always offers His hand of fellowship to whoever would repent. From years and years of being a carpenter, we know that He is not above hard manual labor; from all the times He is shown going off to pray or relaxing at someone's house, He also knows how to *rest*. He is accessible to anyone who wants to speak with Him. The Scriptures point to Jesus as God, and they also point to Him as *fully Man*, with a three-dimensional personality. We do not have a “cardboard cutout” sort of Savior, but a true *Person* that we can get to know as we read the Gospels and pray to Him.

There is another aspect to His personality though, one that most people either don't know about or don't like to talk about. You see my friends, Jesus really doesn't like being told what to do. We never see Him submitting to human authority, whether it is from the Jewish synagogue rulers or from civic authority. Being Divine, He is always aware in the Gospels that man's authority is absolutely *nothing* compared to His, and though He never sinfully rebelled against parent or civic ruler,¹ He still had a kind of self-will and acted with complete freedom. Even when it came to taxes, St. Matthew records that when tax collectors demanded money from Him, He had St. Peter go catch a fish with money in its mouth instead of paying it out of pocket.²

¹ Luke 2:41-51

² Matthew 17:24-27

In his 1533 sermon on our reading, Luther puts it this way:

Now Christ is also a little self-willed and shows here that he is simply not to be dictated to by any one, and that he will be free in all things, as we see also everywhere in the Gospel, that a peculiar firmness or self-will is found in this man, who is nevertheless at other times so mild a man, willing and ready to help, the like of whom was never found on earth. But when they came to him with laws and wanted to be his teachers, then all friendship was at an end, he starts and bounds back, as when you strike on an anvil, and he speaks and does just the contrary they demand of him, although they even say rightly and well, and have God's word for it, as they do here where they come and say: You should do thus, you should hold to the society of good people and not to sinners. This is a precious doctrine taken out of the Scriptures; for Moses himself writes that they should avoid the wicked, and put away evil from among them. They have the text on their side, and come trolling with their Moses, and want to bind him and rule him by their laws.³

The Pharisaic Impulse

The Pharisees were always trying to flex their institutional muscles on Jesus, especially with their interpretations of the Mosaic Law. They were skilled at taking a *good* command and turning it into an overbearing parody of itself. In this case they twisted the command to be intolerant of evil company⁴ into something that meant all sinners themselves should be avoided. They did the same thing with their neurotic Sabbath regulations,⁵ hand-washing rules that aren't even in the Scriptures,⁶ and so much more. Here in our reading though, we see one of their worst distortions. If you took their refusal to speak with sinners seriously enough, you end up with a flat refusal to even speak with Gentiles – the very people that ancient Israel was supposed to be witnessing to: lo and behold, as St. Peter says in the book of Acts, such a regulation was actually proclaimed among the Jews on account of this neurosis.⁷

At first, the Pharisee school of thought was intended to help people be zealous for the Law, building fences of "oral tradition" rules around the real commandments so that people would be too bogged down obeying the former to violate the latter. To bar the people from associating with tax collectors and sinners meant they were kept them from being tempted by household idols, intermarriage with pagans, false prophecies – all sorts of things that were prohibited by Moses. By the time we get to the first century though, all these additional rules became a vehicle for corruption. Enslaving the people to so many needling regulations, the Pharisees became a vicious cabal of oppressors who leached money, time, and honor from the people they were supposed to help.

They grumble against Jesus for flaunting their rules. They are horrified that someone dares to stand up to their prestigious traditions, scared that the people will all follow suit. Note here, the text shows us that they care nothing for the people Jesus speaks with. They do not try to win back the tax collector, nor do they convince the sinner to repent. In their minds, such people were *beneath* them because they made one command into an excuse to break another: in avoiding bad company, they taught themselves to hate their neighbor.

Christ's Response

Jesus is having none of their nonsense. He responds with two Parables, each with the same meaning, to lay emphasis on His point. A man who suffers the loss of his sheep will go find it, and he

3 "Sermons of Martin Luther – Third Sunday after Trinity," found in *God Rules*.

https://godrules.net/library/luther/129luther_d7.htm

4 Deuteronomy 13:5b, "you shall purge the evil person from your midst."

5 Luke 14:1-6

6 Mark 7:1-7

7 Acts 10:28

will rejoice when he gets the sheep back. A woman who loses a tenth of her money will celebrate when she finds it again. If the Pharisees and scribes can understand why someone would seek after a lost sheep or coin, why wouldn't they understand that God wants lost sinners to come back to Him? For that matter, here Christ castigates the Pharisees for their absurd belief that a sheep is more valuable than a human being.

Furthermore, our Savior attacks their exaggerated understanding of the Law. Oh yes, Moses instructed the people to purge the evil from among them, but if they are being shown the way of righteousness then how is that a violation? Turn an evil man from his way and he will no longer be the evil that should be purged. The prophets all did this very thing, witnessing both gently and harshly to the children of Israel and Judah; sometimes they stood by a wicked king as a kind witness to the righteousness of our Lord,⁸ other times they were persecuted for shouting the truth.⁹ How then, could these men judge Jesus for lovingly calling these tax collectors and sinners and showing them a better way? It is as if His Parables were a way of saying "You say I am receiving sinners. But I am not just receiving them, I am *saving* them, and Heaven rejoices to see it!"

Our Savior has, as Luther says, a kind of self-will. But this was not out of some sinful rebellious streak or a hard heart. Christ is not "stiff-necked" as Moses describes rebellious Israel.¹⁰ He flaunted their man-made traditions because He was doing more than the Law could ever ask. Moses says to not keep bad company; Jesus takes a step further by turning bad company into good company. Moses says the Sabbath is a day of rest; Christ goes further by *giving* people rest on the Sabbath and healing their wounds. His expression of freedom, modeling Christian freedom for us, shows that to live freely and justified before God results in doing far more good than the Law could ever ask.

Conclusion

For the believer, one who is justified by faith in Christ, the Law does not apply. Oh it is still there, and we rejoice to have the Ten Commandments as our tutor and guide, but it does not oppress or terrify us. If I work on Sunday to serve my family or cook dinner so my wife can relax, that is no sin. If I approach "bad company" with the witness of Christ crucified for their sins, I have done no wrong. This is not permission to *sin*, but rather an endorsement of cheerful good works and love for our neighbor. And let us not forget that all of us at one point were just like the lost sheep or the lost coin. If anyone should come to you with some overbearing command to do something that the Bible does not ask us to do, all you have to say is "I am already justified by my Savior and Heaven rejoices. I have no need of your tradition nor your rules." And let your heart be at peace.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

8 Isaiah 8

9 Jeremiah 38

10 Exodus 33:3

Sermon for June 28th. 2026
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 50:15-21

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." **16** So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: **17** 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. **18** His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." **19** But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? **20** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. **21** So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Psalm 138

1 I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
2 I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,
for you have exalted above all things
your name and your word.
3 On the day I called, you answered me;
my strength of soul you increased.
4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth,
5 and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.
6 For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly,
but the haughty he knows from afar.
7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve my life;
you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,
and your right hand delivers me.
8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Romans 8:18-25

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **19** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.
20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope
21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of

the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Luke 6:32-36

32 “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. **35** But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. **36** Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Our text for meditation this Fourth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Joseph, son of Jacob and great-grandson of Abraham, found himself in this moment where his brothers knelt before him. He wept as he heard their request for forgiveness, thinly veiled as it was by the story they told. Though they lied, saying that their late father Jacob asked for it, Joseph could tell that they had true remorse and fear, a real need for forgiveness. Graciously, Joseph pardons them for what they did to him, going even further by promising to provide for them and their families.

The forgiveness that Joseph grants to his brothers is astounding, the perfect example of the kind of forgiveness that Jesus offers us. The crime that they committed was something most people would say is unforgivable. Fourteen years before the moment recounted in our reading, Joseph's brothers threw him in a pit, sold him to Ishmaelite slavers (who resold him to Egyptians), then told Jacob their father that his beloved son was killed by a wild animal.¹ Envious of Joseph's prophetic dreams of prominence in the family, and enraged by the preferential treatment their father showed him, they ruined his life to satisfy their petty resentment. They then spent fourteen years living a lie while their father Jacob grieved a son that was still breathing. Not only was Joseph enslaved in Egypt, he found himself in jail over a false accusation,² and thus he toiled in bondage even worse than before. It was only by our Lord sending the Pharaoh prophetic dreams that Joseph was given freedom, and later *prominence* in Egypt as one appointed to lead the people through a period of famine.³

So now, with his brothers kneeling before him, Joseph has every opportunity to get revenge. When he interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams regarding the famine that was now happening, Joseph was elevated to being the second most powerful man in the country. He had the authority, if he so chose, to kill his brothers for what they did to him. He could have spitefully put *them* into slavery or imprisonment as well, giving them a taste of their own medicine. But despite whatever his flesh was saying, even if it was *screaming* from within him to get revenge on his brothers, Joseph decided to forgive and bless them instead. He chose the harder but more gracious path.

God's Intentions and Joseph's forgiveness

Why did Joseph forgive them? What helped him make up his mind to forgive? Being filled with the Holy Spirit, he understood that God saw the evil intentions of the brothers' hearts and allowed them to do what they did. And why did He permit it? So He could save the whole region from famine. Seven years of famine were coming, and millions would starve if our Lord did not intervene. He did this by

1 Genesis 37

2 Genesis 39

3 Genesis 41

sending Pharaoh dreams which Joseph would interpret. If Joseph was not there, then Egypt (being a pagan nation) would have no one who worshiped the true God – and thus no one who could pass along the crucial message they needed to hear.

While saving the people from famine was important, our Lord also intervened so as to take care of Joseph. By giving Joseph the interpretation for Pharaoh's dreams, the young man was brought to national prominence and riches: he went from slave to prisoner to the second in command of all Egypt. Furthermore, by letting the famine extend to Jacob's home, Joseph's brothers and their father had to move closer to Egypt for grain. In this way, our Lord ensured that the truth came out and reconciliation could be made.

The most important reason for all of this is the picture God saw of the Gospel being preached. With Joseph, we see one man who suffered unjustly, being placed in the hands of foreigners by his own kin, and all of his sufferings happened so as to save many from death. Does that not sound familiar my friends? Though he was unaware of it, Joseph's life is patterned off of the very Gospel that we believe in. Jesus Christ suffered unjustly, being placed in the hands of foreigners by His own kin, and all of His sufferings happened so as to save many from death. Joseph becomes a *type*, or foreshadowing, of Christ. Our Heavenly Father, knowing the thoughts of Joseph's brothers from before time began, said “Ah, so this is your choice. I know exactly what to do with this, that people may know what My salvation looks like.”

As Joseph was a prophet,⁴ he understood that God was doing something bigger with his life. He saw that God made good come out of the evil that his brothers intended, interfering with the consequences of their decisions so as to save lives and show salvation to the people. Now *all* of Egypt could see that it is Joseph's God that is the only One who can save. Once the man could see all of this magnificent and gracious Divine interference in hindsight, forgiving those who harmed him was far less difficult.

Conclusion

In our Gospel reading, Christ instructs us, saying “be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” Joseph embodies that ideal. Though he was woefully harmed, he nonetheless forgave and had mercy in a most salutary and Godly way. Why is this? My friends, it is because long before the Apostle said it Joseph knew that “for those who love God all things work together for good.”⁵ Perhaps you have suffered at the hands of another. I know I certainly have, many times. Malicious and uncaring people are all around us, and even believers hurt one another. But our Lord sees your pain and promises that if you love and trust Him, He shall make all things work together for good the same way they did for Joseph.

Sadly, we often forget this. Many of us do not forgive because we have a sort of distortion in our minds, a weak faith. We forget that God promises to make things right and accomplish good despite the evil of sinners, so we hold on to unforgiveness, and poison ourselves through the bitterness that comes with it, never expecting our Lord to interfere the way that He does. But if we would just look to the example of Joseph, seeing our Lord's work in action, it shall be much easier to fulfill our Lord's command to be merciful. Let us forgive those who have wronged us, looking forward in hope to the restoration and blessings He promises, both here and in the hereafter.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁴ His prophetic dreams tell us as much!

⁵ Romans 8:28