

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
09/22/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Luke 14:1-11
David McMinn

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

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Gospel according to Saint Luke the 14th chapter.

What is the first sin humans committed in The Fall in the Garden of Eden? Eve doubted the Word of God. The serpent asked her if God really said and she actually gave credence to the devil's sly question and began to think "Did God really say?" The devil's second temptation was to convince Eve (and her husband who was with her) that God was withholding something from them. They could be gods. They at least could be god-like if they ate the forbidden fruit. Satan said in response to Eve's paraphrasing of God's warning, "*You will not surely die.*" And after he says this, she begins to think about it less than purely and Satan moves in for the kill. "*For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" So *when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*"

So what is our parent's first sin? Many times people say pride, others say doubt, but I tell you it's even more basic than that. Doubting God's Word and feeling pride are nothing but violations of the 1st Commandment. That commandment for those who don't know it, and I urge you to learn the

commandments and the rest of the catechism so you have what is the minimum knowledge that Luther thought one needed as a Christian, that 1st

Commandment is “*You shall have no other god’s before Me.*”

Pride before God can only mean one thinks better of himself than he does God. Doubting God shows either a distrust of Him or a person thinking he or she is smarter than God. Either way pride and doubt are simply manifestations of having a false god. This sin is to fear, love and/or trust one’s self more than the God who created you. Mankind’s first sin was to create for himself another god and that of course in man himself.

Satan doesn’t want you to think like that. He’d rather you say “I think, therefore I am and here is what I think about God and here is how God is.” See in that way, just as Eve did, we construct a god in our own image instead of us being conformed to the image of God.

That’s always the fight isn’t it? It’s always us needing to be conformed to the image of God, to be forgiven and declared innocent. But we’d rather not do this. When I say we I mean our old nature that we still carry around with us even after baptism and faith. Our old nature wants things done it’s way. Our sinful nature is a god. A false god to be sure, but have no doubt your sinful nature is a god.

Take the first half of our Gospel reading today: “*One Sabbath, when [Jesus] went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the*

Sabbath, or not?" But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to 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?" And they could not reply to these things."

If you had to define God by one word what would it be? Let me suggest "mercy". God is mercy. If you want proof of that simply look to the cross of Christ. God in His mercy gave us the Sabbath Day. He created the world in 6 days. Then on the 7th day God rested. He wasn't tired. God doesn't get tired. No God rested because He is merciful to you. Working, making a living, going to school, being in this sinful world is tiring. It taxes the body and soul even of the Christian. God knew from the beginning that you would need rest. And especially in a 'sinful' world with all its many temptations and spiritual battles God knew you would need rest. And so He gives you as a gift a day, the Sabbath Day to rest. He gives you a day in which He grants you the privilege of coming to church to hear His Word and receive His Sacraments so that your sins are forgiven and your faith is strengthened. Without this Sabbath Rest your faith will die. Just as your body needs rest so too your soul. God set aside a day for you to do exactly that. The Sabbath is more mercy from God.

Now about this Sabbath Day God said, *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord*

made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

By Jesus' day man, who is always trying to create a god in his own image and who is always trying to make himself righteous before that god by his own works, had completely distorted this law. Instead of being a show of God's mercy the Sabbath Day became a burden. Jesus asks a simple question *“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”* If God is mercy then what is the answer? Obviously yes, *“Yes it's lawful (God pleasing) to heal on the Sabbath.”* Yes, it is lawful (God pleasing) to help your neighbor in distress. It is always lawful to show God's mercy to your neighbor.

But the men before Jesus that day had constructed a god who could only be appeased through rigid and unmerciful law following. Forget the neighbor, let him suffer. Yet they were also hypocritical as Jesus points out when he asks them if they would help their own flesh and blood or rescue some animal they'd bought with their own money. If you'd help these, why wouldn't you help your neighbor whom God created and redeemed? They had a false god.

It's a false god that presents itself in various ways. We may not be strict (even strict enough Sabbath Day keepers) but see if this hits closer to home: *“Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with*

shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'"

You want to get somebody upset, question them in a way that challenges their view of themselves. If our first sin is to make ourselves God then anything that challenges that is bound to get a big negative reaction. We think too much of ourselves. Even people who think so little of themselves that they think God couldn't possibly save them will become incensed when you try and show them that their thought is wrong, that Jesus' death was enough to cover their sin too. "No, can't possibly be. I'm too bad" that is "I'm too great..." "My sin is so bad God couldn't possibly save me." Even when we think too little about ourselves we hold it with an absolute conviction we are right. And so who is God? We are.

Jesus sees all these people thinking more about themselves as they jockey for position at the banquet. They all want the best seat. They all want it their way. They are 'god' after all. They're the most important person and what they think is correct. Jesus, as a practical matter, says you'd be better off to take the lowest seat and be asked to move up rather than have the opposite happen. He doesn't mean there is virtue in hypocritically picking the lower seat. There is not.

What Jesus is really getting at for them and you is "you think too much of yourself". "You have a false god and it's you." Think about the things that make

you angry. You have to do something you don't want to do. Your schedule gets changed. You have to spend money for something you don't want to spend it on. You have to be around people you don't want to be around. Someone interrupts you. What is it that makes you angry? As humans our greatest temptation is to think more about ourselves, our opinions and our stuff than we ought. We're not merciful according to our sinful nature.

One evening there was a banquet. It was between a Great Man and his neighbors who weren't so great. But He was determined to demonstrate to His neighbors how great a man He was. So before He lavished them with food so great that none of the neighbors could afford it He did something that left them without a doubt what kind of man He was. He got a bowl, He filled it with water, He got a towel and He proceeded to wash His neighbors' feet.

Now there were many ways Jesus showed His mercy while He was on this earth. But none is more pointed than Him washing His disciples' feet (even Judas' feet) and then feeding His disciples with His own body and blood and then shedding His blood for them on the cross.

Of course that same mercy is yours. Jesus, who is God and has every right to think highly of Himself, lowered Himself to our level, and He died in our place that our sins might be forgiven. Why? Why did He do this? Because our God is mercy. Because Christ Jesus always thinks first how He might help His neighbor and how He might better His neighbor's position.

On this Sabbath Day Jesus comes to you with healing. Today Jesus gives you His Word that repairs the self inflicted and world inflicted wounds you

received during this past week. Today Jesus sets a feast before you. He nourishes you with His Word and if that weren't enough He calls you up to the altar, the highest seat, to receive from Him a feast of His body and blood given and shed for you so that you might always be His person, His created and redeemed person. Why does He do this? Because our God is mercy. Amen.

May the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.