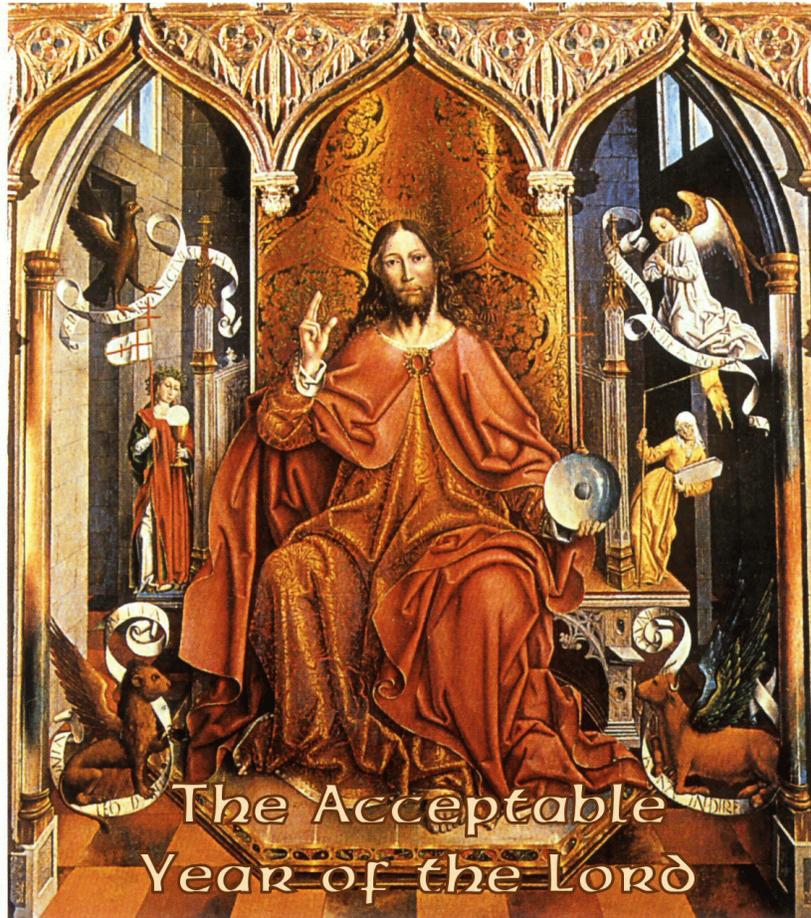


A. D. The Acceptable Year of the Lord

A. D.



A Sunday School Curriculum
on the Historic Lectionary

Pax Domini Press

Teacher's Edition Level 2

(Trinity through the 13th Sunday after Trinity)

Pax Domini Press

A.D. The Acceptable Year of the Lord

Level 2

Introduction

The Acceptable Year of the Lord

According to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61: 1-2), several activities would signal that the Messiah had been anointed by the Holy Spirit to save His people. Among other things, He would *proclaim good tidings to the poor*; He would *heal the brokenhearted*; and He would *open the prison to those who were bound*. Jesus fulfilled this prophecy after He was baptized and began preaching. In His first public proclamation in a synagogue, Jesus opened up to this Isaiah prophecy and declared that this prophecy was about Himself. (Luke 4: 18-19)

The last activity that Jesus quoted from the Isaiah prophecy serves as the title for this curriculum: "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." What is the "acceptable year of the Lord"?

"Acceptable" is the English translation of the Hebrew word used for the sacrifices that the Lord would receive as an "acceptable" offering. If the Lord did not accept an offering, Israel remained in her sins and under God's wrath. If the Lord accepted an offering, it was a blessing indeed. Thus, the promise that the "acceptable year of the Lord" was coming was wonderful news to Israel.

Among the promises given to Israel was that the Messiah would offer an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord, and the Lord would be pleased with His people forever. (Isaiah 56: 7) This sacrifice, of course, was Jesus Himself. Jesus is the acceptable offering to the Lord. The atonement of Jesus, then makes each year an "acceptable year of the Lord."

With the coming of God in human flesh, heaven and earth were united in His Person. God's will is done "on earth as it is in heaven." This union of heaven and earth in the Person of Jesus unfolds a mystery for the Church. Even as Jesus at the same time is Lord of all things and servant of all people, or even as Jesus at the same time fills all things and is localized in specific locations, so does the Church have earthly marks and heavenly marks. It is at the same time the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant.

With regard to time, the Church is at one and the same time an everlasting body, established from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1: 4; Hebrews 4: 3; Revelation 17: 8), and also a body existing in time, living under the cross. Being a body existing in time, the elements of time are used by the Church for heavenly purposes. Thus, to speak of the "year of the Lord" has eternal meaning. Each year is an annual cycle of the one, acceptable, eternal year of the Lord. So powerful is this understanding of history, that the very designation of the year these past two millennia has been "A.D.", from *Anno Domini*, meaning, "the Year of the Lord." Every year since Jesus' birth has been a year baptized into His name, lifted from the rut of a decaying earth into the glories of the eternal, heavenly year.

The Historic Lectionary

The Church received from her Hebrew heritage the practice of an annual cycle of readings. This annual cycle underscores the union between time and eternity. As the Christian gets older "in time" and travels the rocky road that is this earthly life, he nevertheless gets a glimpse of the eternal as he falls comfortably into the annual rhythm of the historic Gospels. What has been going on before him goes on in his life, and it will continue to go on after his life. He is given to be a participant in the life of Christ as reflected in the historically important Gospels. Even for those who use the new "three year series," a trace of this understanding is still reflected in the expectation of Christians to hear, for example, the Christmas story of Luke 2 on Christmas Eve every year. There is a comfort to hearing this story each and every year. The historic lectionary applies this principle to the 52 Sundays of the Church Year.

What of the historic lectionary? Does it deny Christians the opportunity to hear other important Gospel texts? Does it lead to biblical illiteracy because so few texts are used, relative to the three-year lectionary? The answer to this question depends upon what the goal of a lectionary is. Is the goal of a lectionary academic? Is its purpose to teach, say, the Gospel of Mark? Or is it pastoral? That is, is its purpose to embrace the Christian into the life of Christ in a way that has served the piety of the Church for over a thousand years?

It might be noted that, in fact, the historic lectionary does have more of a "devotional" quality to it. The Gospels that make up the historic lectionary often center on Jesus' miracles as opposed to His teachings. By this subtle shift, the hearer is given to take part in the Gospel in a way that is quite special. Whether it's the widow who lost her son, or the nobleman who worships Jesus, whether it's the ruler whose daughter was about to die, or the ten lepers, the Lord speaks to us through these real life characters, and so becomes a real life Lord to us, not just the subject of "Luke's portrayal of Christ."

The historic lectionary assumes that the Holy Spirit had a role in the writing and canonization of the Gospels. Where the newer three-year lectionary takes the academic position that each Gospel must be seen in its own light – thus we have "Matthew's Jesus," or "John's Jesus" – the historic lectionary draws from each Gospel to portray the one Christ. It takes for granted that the Holy Spirit used the individual evangelists each to make a contribution to the full portrayal of Christ.

An analogy might be given: Each Gospel might be called a "snapshot" of Jesus' Person and Work. Even as four photographers may take a snap shot of the same flower from four different angles – each snapshot giving a unique and beautiful portrayal of the flower – so does each Gospel give a unique and beautiful portrayal of Jesus' Person and Work.

Yet, a snapshot remains just that, a two-dimensional picture that, while beautiful, loses out in depth and liveliness. Those who work with three-dimensional graphics know that the only way to add the third dimension to an image is to work several two-dimensional pictures into that one, lively, three-dimensional image. This process is arguably what the historic lectionary does with the life of Jesus. It portrays a three-dimensional picture of Jesus. Further, placed in the liturgical and sacramental context, this picture becomes alive and moving.

Pastors who work with the three-year lectionary might be heard to say, "We're in Matthew this year." Without judging this innocent manner of speaking, it might be noted that the goal of all apostles and prophets in the Scriptures (such as Matthew) is to "decrease, that Jesus might increase." The historic lectionary erases distinctions among the evangelists and allows the preacher and hearer simply to say, "We're in Jesus this year." As the picture on the front of this program shows, Christ is front and center. The evangelists each contribute to the full picture of that which we call, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Finally, just by way of note, because the historical lectionary is just that, *historical*, there are far more hymns, collects, introits, graduals, and other propers that fit these Gospels, because the Church has had centuries to develop them. The pastor who uses the historic lectionary will notice how beautifully connected the collect is to the Gospel, how the collect sets the theme for the day and is answered in the Gospel. He will notice how easily the words of the introit can decorate his preaching, making the whole liturgy not just a patchwork of texts, but a living witness that draws the hearer into the life of Christ.

About this curriculum

Congregations using this material will get (1) workbooks for each student, (2) a teacher's edition for the teacher, (3) chapel service bulletins, (4) extra test/review sheets for the older levels, (5) extra activity sheets for the younger levels, and (6) a memory book (with verses and terms) for all ages.

Teachers should have their rooms equip with *New King James Version* Bibles, hymnals, and Small Catechisms. Each lesson will involve a reading of the Gospel, going over the workbooks, and extra activities. The teacher should study the material beforehand by at least reading the commentary and suggestions that are given in this teacher's edition.

This teacher's guide will first give a general introduction to each lesson and a brief commentary on the theme of the lesson. The guide will then be particularized for the level at hand. An answer key to the various activities will be given in this section.

In order to prepare most properly for this curriculum, the following is suggested:

- a. A time might be established, perhaps once a month, when the Sunday School teachers meet with the pastor. The pastor may review the Gospels for that month and answer any other questions a teacher may have.
- b. The teachers should read the text fully before reading the commentary that follows.
- c. If possible, the teachers might get a copy of the propers (introit, gradual, other readings, collect) for that day and work those into the lesson.

General suggestions for teaching Level 2 material:

- (1) Make up a schedule for each lesson. Some lessons require more time for reading and learning the story, while other lessons may require more time for discussion and activities. For most lessons, the reading and learning of the story should occupy the majority of the time. Few extra activities will need to be planned, and "off topic" discussions may undermine completion of the lesson.
- (2) Assign memory work and give rewards for completing memory work; give parents a copy of the verse to be memorized so that they may work with the child.
- (3) Prioritize activities (The following priorities are rooted in the conclusion of education experts that children at this age level learn first in concrete terms and are only beginning to understand abstract concepts.)
 - c. The first priority in each lesson is the *hearing* (or reading) of the story.
 - c. The second priority is *understanding the elements and terms* of the story.
 - c. The third priority is *understanding the theology* (and the liturgical dimension of the lesson).
 - c. The fourth priority is *doing the activities*.
- (4) Take turns reading to the children and letting them read. Some lessons may require the teacher to read the entire story in the interest of time.
- (5) Review the terms with the children before each story. Find a few key phrases or teachings that highlight the important truths of each Gospel and repeat them several times during the class.
- (6) Print out flash cards with either terms or memory verses written on them.

About the Artwork

Some people wonder about the choice of artwork for *Pax Domini Press* materials. They believe that some artwork may not be suitable for children because it may be too serious, or dark, or ornate, or extravagant, or symbolic. *Pax Domini Press* asks the user of this curriculum to let the artwork stand on its own. Often times when we make judgments about what children like or do not like, we impose our own prejudices upon them. To the child, there is no reason why a particular

piece of artwork would look “old” or “Medieval.” He does not have the broad experience even to place that artwork into a context. It’s just art to him.

Further, all the artwork of this curriculum was used as a teaching tool for children at *some* time in the past. There is no reason why it cannot be used for children today. Children today are no different than children of yesterday. True, as they grow older and mature, they will be immersed into a culture that is rapid-moving, electronic, noisy, and artistically cartoonish, but at the age to which this curriculum is directed, that development has yet to occur. Beyond that, it is critical in this spinning-out-of-control age that we pass on to our children a heritage that is rich in meaning, reverent, sacred, and timeless. We want to give our children something they grow into, not out of.

This is why *Pax Domini* asks the user simply to let the artwork stand on its own. The artwork can often be used to teach important points in the Gospel, and the teacher will notice with amazement how some of the children will meditate with wide eyes on a piece of artwork that is over 500 years old. They see it not as old and stale, but as a beautiful work that respectfully portrays their Lord.

The Activities Folder

The Activities Folder on the CD has the following PDF files that may be used by both Levels 1 & 2. Some activities will be more appropriate for younger or older children. The files are named according to the Sunday in which they come up, such as “Trinity13.” If there are two files for that Sunday, it will be titled such as “Trinity2a” or “Trinity2b.” Further explanation is given in the suggestions for each lesson.

Under Trinity5 and Trinity7 are also some activities that help teach the four Gospels in general. There are four images of the four symbols of the four Gospels, and there are verses that go with each. Five verses teach the Person of Christ (two from Matthew, one from the three others), and four verses teach the Work of Jesus (one from each).

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Pentecost | Time line booklet; complete each sentence of booklet and paste correct picture with sentence. |
| Trinity | Trinity Symbol project. Color triangle and cut out; color circle, color, and glue to triangle. Color pictures of Persons of Trinity and paste at corners of Triangle. |
| Trinity1 | Bible Verse. Color picture and trace out bible verse. |
| Trinity2a | Poor man with quote bubble; fill out what he might be praying. |
| Trinity2b | Invitation card; children fill out the invitation with a Gospel invitation. |
| Trinity3a | Quote bubble with letters to trace out of <i>Gloria in Excelsis</i> . |
| Trinity3b | Maze. The correct path spells out a secret phrase. |
| Trinity4 | Teaching cards that review parts of the Gospel for that day; they may be colored. |
| Trinity5a/b | Two pictures of fish that can be cut and glued together in accordions, viewed in two different ways. |
| Trinity5Gospels | Images of the symbols of all four Gospels. |
| Trinity5Verses | Verses from the four Gospels that teach the Person of Jesus Christ. |
| Trinity6 | “Luke” word fill out; color symbols of the four Gospels different colors, “Luke” will emerge. |
| Trinity6a | What the Law says/What Jesus says. Children fill out each according to the Gospel for the day. |
| Trinity6b | Coloring page of Jesus giving peace to His brethren after they all abandoned Him. |
| Trinity7 | Word plates to go along with collage based on the words of the meaning of the 1 st article of the Creed. |
| Trinity7Verses | Verses from the four Gospels that teach the Work of Jesus Christ. |
| Trinity8 | Images of each Person of the Trinity, along with images that teach each part of the Creed. |
| Trinity9 | Coloring page of poor man with hand of God behind him. |
| Trinity10a | Psalms book of prayer; a cover may be decorated and put on the outside. |
| Trinity10b | Map of Roman Empire; children color it and familiarize with the ancient world. |
| Trinity11a | Coloring page. |
| Trinity11b | Pharisee and tax collector images; quote bubbles must be placed over correct person. |

+ + +

One God; Three Persons

Week: Trinity
Story: Jesus teaches Nicodemus about heavenly birth.
Text: John 3: 1-15

Theme: The Trinity is One God; Three Persons. The Gospel reveals the roles of each Person.

Commentary

Here is the last of seven Gospels from the Gospel of John. One of the remarkable omissions from the Gospel of John is the frequent use of the image of the kingdom of Heaven, or the kingdom of God. The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) often reveal the doctrines of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and Christ's ascension using *kingdom* language.

Accordingly, Jesus is the Divine Son of God, the King of kings sitting at the right hand of the Father, Who has authority in heaven and on earth, and Who extends His authority through the Holy Spirit. By the Holy Spirit comes the kingdom of God. The Gospel of John lacks this *kingdom* language, with two notable exceptions. The one exception is Jesus' famous statement, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18: 36) The other exception is in today's Gospel.

The above observation may account for the abundance of Johannine Gospels from Easter to today's feast of the Holy Trinity. The synoptic Gospels were written earlier, during a time when the Church was mainly Jewish, and there were hopes of a re-established kingdom of Israel. The disciples asked Jesus on the day of His ascension, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1: 6) Many Jews falsely interpreted Jesus' message of the coming kingdom to have been for an earthly messianic kingdom. At best, they were eagerly expecting Him to return quickly (in their lifetimes) to establish the kingdom in Israel. When this did not happen, many Christians became frustrated (cf. II Peter 3: 4ff), and so they needed to be encouraged.

John's Gospel was written, in part, to refine people's understanding of the kingdom of God. And so He teaches that important truth from the lips of Jesus, "My kingdom is not of this world." He also expresses Jesus' teaching on the kingdom in other, more universal images, like that of the Good Shepherd and the Helper. By the use of John's Gospel during this critical period in the Church Year, the Church is forever immunized from believing the false doctrine of millennialism, which holds that Christ will come and establish His kingdom on earth for a thousand years. No, the kingdom of God means something else.

Today's Gospel perfectly spells out Jesus' doctrine of the kingdom of God, and in doing so, it reveals the Holy Trinity beautifully. The Gospel, interestingly, stops short of the classic "Gospel in a nutshell" verse, John 3: 16. How could the Church, in its wisdom, miss this obvious and clear presentation of the Gospel? The more pertinent question is, how do so many people today, who know this passage by heart, gloss over the fifteen verses that precede it, which speak of Holy Baptism as the entrance point into the Kingdom of Heaven?

The baptismal language of John 3: 5 connects the Feast of the Holy Trinity to baptism. Of course, it is at Holy Baptism that we are first put in contact with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so this baptismal language is appropriate. The creeds, all of which are Trinitarian – and of which the Athanasian Creed is an expansion – were first used as baptismal formulas. They were the confession made by the candidate prior to being baptized, even as yet today the Apostle's Creed is confessed at baptisms. We come by this liturgical rite honestly, for today's Gospel sets baptism together with the Holy Trinity. The Lord gives us His name in Baptism, and we confess what His name does for us.

The nub of this Gospel is the kingdom of God into which one is born again by water and the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is "from above," and in fact, a perfectly acceptable translation for "born again" could also be "born from above."

How does this all work? Jesus explains it using the metaphor of wind. Wind is not seen, but it is heard. So is the Holy Spirit. He is not seen, but heard. Of course, how is the Holy Spirit heard but through the Word of the Gospel which He preaches through Jesus and later through the apostles. (cf. I Peter 1: 23) Thus, it is by the Word that water can effect entrance into the kingdom of God.

By this sound of preaching, Jesus too testifies to heavenly things. Thus He says, "We speak what We know and testify what We have seen." The capitalized "We" in both the King James Version and the New King James Versions attests to the historic view that this "We" is the Holy Trinity. This is appropriate, because bearing testimony is one of the works of the Holy Trinity. (See John 8: 18 and John 15: 26) Who else can honestly reveal the things of heaven? And if it is true, as Jesus claims, that every testimony must be established by two or three witnesses (see Deuteronomy 19: 15 & John 8: 17), then Who better a witness of heavenly things than the three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What, then, do these three bear witness to? They bear witness to the lifting up of the Son, as Moses lifted up the serpent. That is the vision of heaven that is revealed: Jesus lifted up via His cross, in His ascension, such that by faith in Him we receive salvation. And this is bound up with birth from above by the Holy Spirit in the water. That is, the water is our point of contact with the cross, in which we are raised with Christ by the Holy Spirit, and so saved. The Holy Trinity bears witness to this glorious and gracious event, which is worked out in Holy Baptism.

Liturgically, there is always a connection between the cross and the Trinity, even as we cross ourselves at the name of the Trinity. Baptism, cross, and Trinity all go together, and this Gospel from John spells it out clearly.

Answer Key

Questions on page 1:

- When did Nicodemus come to Jesus? *At night.* Why might he have come at this time? *He had to secretly meet with Jesus.*

- Where did Nicodemus say Jesus came from? *God.*
- What did Jesus say must happen for someone to see the kingdom of God? *He must be born again.*
- How does Jesus say someone is born again? *By water and the spirit.*
- How is the Holy Spirit like the wind? *He is heard.*
- Who is the only One Who has come down from heaven? *Jesus.*
- What does it mean that the Son must be lifted up? *He is crucified; He is exalted to the right hand of God.*
- What is the promise for those who believe in Jesus? *They will not perish but have eternal life.*

Matching on pages 1:

The Father > He sends His Son to die for us.

The Son > He dies for us and sits at the right hand of the Father.

The Holy Spirit > He gives us new life through Holy Baptism.

Chart (page 7):

| | Neither created nor begotten | Not made or created, but begotten | Not made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding |
|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| The Father | X | | |
| The Son | | X | |
| The Holy Spirit | | | X |

True and False (page 2): (1) F, (2) T.

Picture on page 4:

Top picture: Jesus shares His supper with the disciples at Emmaeus. The Holy Spirit consecrates the elements by the Word. The Father is the "Fount and Source" of the goodness of this supper.

Right picture: Jesus rises from the dead. He is raised by the Father in the Spirit.

Left picture: Jesus is baptized. The Holy Spirit descended upon Him; the Father proclaimed Him His Son.

Bottom picture: The Father receives the one sacrifice of Jesus for sins; Jesus gives up the Spirit at His death.

Middle picture: The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Suggestions

1. Review the three articles of the Creed from the Small Catechism. Give different examples of the work of God and ask the children if that given work is of the Father, of the Son, or of the Holy Spirit. (For example, say, "He gives us house and home." The Father gives us this. "He redeems us by His blood." The Son does this.)
2. Emphasize that God works toward US "From the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit." Conversely, we approach GOD "By the Holy Spirit, through the Son, to the Father."
3. Underscore that the name of the Triune God is extremely important. A baptism, for example, done "In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier" is not a baptism. Likewise, a baptism done in the correct name, but which does not believe in the true doctrine of the Trinity, is no baptism. We do not play around with God's name, as many churches are now doing in order to be politically correct.
4. Some analogies for the Trinity may help the children understand it. Jesus is related to the Father the way the rays of the sun are related to the sun. Both are the same age, but the sun is the source of the rays. Another analogy is that of the mind, the word, and the voice. A mind produces a word; the mouth speaks it; the sound delivers the word, and the waves are carried through the air (sound cannot travel through a vacuum). In the same way, the Father speaks the Word, the Holy Spirit delivers the Word. We cannot know what is on the mind of another without that person speaking a word, and the air carrying that word into our ear. The same is true with hearing the Father.
5. Have the children color and cut out the various parts of the Trinity symbol, the triangle first, then the overlapping circles over the triangle, and then the symbols of the Persons over that. Display the Trinity symbol in the church.

+ + +

Lazarus and the Rich Man

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Week: The 1st Sunday after Trinity</p> <p>Story: Lazarus and the Rich Man.</p> <p>Text: Luke 16: 19-31</p> | <p>Theme: The Lord lifts up the humble high, but casts the proud and mighty down low.</p> |
|---|--|

Commentary

After our long journey through the Gospel as revealed by St. John, we get a Gospel from Luke. Twelve out of the next Seventeen Gospels will be from Luke, who has his own unique contribution to the Church Year. From Luke, for example, we got those Gospels which are not found anywhere else, like the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Unjust Judge, the raising of the widow's son, and today's story of Lazarus and the rich man. Also unique to Luke is the story of the widow's mite.

Three of these stories unique to Luke involves widows, and his presentation of Jesus is that of a caring Savior for the weak, as exemplified by the widow. The Church, having been set on a theologically straight course by John's steering through those important seasons of Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity, now gets to the business of living out her daily existence in this world, this side of heaven. This business is, among other things, care for widows. (cf. James 1: 27)

This week begins the "time of the Church" or the "ordinary time" Ordinary does not mean "common" in the sense that we often understand the word. It rather means "numbered" as in the word "ordinal" for "ordinal number" (meaning using words like "first," "second," or "third" as opposed to "one," "two," "three"). And so, this week is the "first" Sunday after Trinity, hence beginning the "ordinal" or "numbered" time of the Church Year. Another ordinal time of the Church Year is after Epiphany. The color for these ordinal times of the year is green. Green, the color of plant life, both confesses the eternal life that we have in the Church and the growth that the Church undergoes by the Word.

The Gospel for today is a nice inauguration of Luke's testimony of the Gospel. The theme can basically be summed up by Psalm 147: 6: *The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground.* Beginning as we are "the time of the Church," how fitting to be given this Gospel, in which the Church is at once reminded that her path is better marked by poor Lazarus than by the rich man. The Church will not be about earthly glory or earthly riches. Rather, her path will be that of Lazarus, whose glory did not happen until he passed from this existence. How necessary is this lesson in an age where so many churches quest earthly success and earthly glory! Early on, the Church is given the challenge: *will she endure until the end?* Will she bear with her suffering in the wilderness of this world, or will she give up the faith, as some told Job (a Lazarus-like figure) to do?

The Church is comforted to know that the "rich men" of this world's existence, who torment the Church, who mock the Church, who fare sumptuously in this world, will be avenged in the next world. Meanwhile, the "Lazarus" faith of the Church will be vindicated, when she feasts at Abraham's bosom.

To get to the specifics of the Gospel, Lazarus' name means "One who God helps." Even as the Lord helps the Church in the midst of her sorrows, so did God help Lazarus. God helped Lazarus in five ways: (1) Through the community, he was laid at the rich man's gate; God worked His mercy through others, as He often does. (2) God used the dogs to lick Lazarus' wounds; dogs were used medicinally in those days for that very purpose. (3) God helped Lazarus through the angels, who took him to Abraham's bosom. (4) God laid him at Abraham's breast, a place of honor; we think of how John laid at Jesus' breast. (5) God remembered Lazarus' name; that we know the name of a character in Jesus' story is singularly unique – no other story or parable of Jesus names characters, and but for another Lazarus, whom Jesus raised, we don't know the names of anyone Jesus healed.

The rich man, on the other hand, was evil not because he was rich – being rich is not a sin – but for five other reasons: (1) He fared sumptuously every day, not observing the Sabbath or allowing his servants to observe the Sabbath. (2) He did not take care of his dogs; the Lord commands that we have compassion on our animals. (3) He did not take care of the poor at his gate; the Lord says, "Do not oppress the poor at the gate." (Proverbs 22: 22) (4) The rich man never repented even after he died; he never confessed his sins and his lack of mercy. (5) The rich man thought he was special because he was a Jew; he thought that he should be given special privileges just because he was a son of Abraham.

The Church can take comfort from this Gospel that her endurance in faith will pay off, and that evil will not triumph. The Lord lifts up the humble.

Answer Key

Questions on page 5:

- What did the rich man beg Abraham the first time? *That Lazarus might dip his finger in water to touch his tongue.*
- How did Abraham answer the first time? *In life, the rich man received his good things, and Lazarus evil things; now it is reversed. There is a gulf between us.*
- What did the rich man beg Abraham the second time? *Send Lazarus to my father's house to warn my brothers.*
- How did Abraham answer the second time? *They have Moses and the Prophets.*
- What did the rich man say to Abraham a third time? *If someone comes from the dead, they will listen.*
- How did Abraham respond the third time? *If they won't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they won't listen if someone rises from the dead.*
- Did the rich man ever repent of his sins? *No.*

Discussion topics (on page 6):

- #1 It proves that riches are not a sign of God's favor, nor poverty a sign of His displeasure. Lazarus' name means "The Lord helps." As Jesus teaches, "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the

just and on the unjust.”

#2 We can show them that if they endure in faith unto the end, they will be lifted up by God into His heavenly dwellings, sharing in the riches of eternal life. Life here is brief, the suffering only momentary.

Hymn Study: Jesus Priceless Treasure (page 7);

Verse 1

1. What are we doing while we anguish and languish? *Yearning for the Lord.*
2. What is the only thing that we want or need according to this verse? *Jesus.*

Verse 3

3. What four enemies do we defy? *Satan, death, fear, and the world.*
4. Why can we defy these enemies? *God's great power guards every hour.*

Verse 5

5. What do we leave? *The evil world.*
6. What once blinded us that we leave behind? *Sin.*

Verse 6

7. What leaves when Jesus enters in? *Fear and sadness.*
8. What happens for those who love the Father? *Have peace amidst the storms.*
9. What helps us to bear all things here on earth? *Knowing that Jesus is our priceless treasure.*

Crossword Puzzle (page 8):

Across

1. *Sheol*
3. *Tormented*
5. *Purple*
6. *Rise*
8. *Die*
9. *Send*

Down

1. *Scriptures*
2. *Late*
3. *Trusted*
4. *Eyes*
7. *Sins*

Suggestions

1. Work in the idea that God knows our names, as Lazarus had a name that was remembered and told in story. Even though he was reckoned as nameless by the world's standards, God, through Jesus, mentioned his name. When we are baptized, Jesus calls us by name, and our names are written in the Book of Life.
2. A small discussion on riches might be held. Are riches evil? No, but they can deceive us into thinking that we can create a heaven on earth. Riches should be seen as a gift from God that he gives so that it can be used in service of His kingdom.
3. Remind the children of the meaning of the color purple. It was a color worn only by the rich and by kings, because the dye needed to make the color was so rare and expensive. Remind them that this is the reason for the purple colored seasons of Advent and Lent. These seasons focus on the kingship that Jesus has by way of the cross.
4. The truth that God raises up the humble, but brings down the mighty is a reoccurring theme not only in the Scriptures, but in the Trinity season. Emphasize this teaching.
5. The activity is a simply coloring assignment, tracing out the phrase "The Lord raises the poor from the dust." The children should see the connection between Jesus' resurrection and the Lord's raising of the poor from the dust.

+ + +

The Parable of the Great Supper

Week: The 2nd Sunday after Trinity
Story: The Parable of the Great Supper
Text: Luke 14: 16-24

Theme: The Kingdom of Heaven is a great supper, to which we are invited by the Gospel.

Commentary

Beginning with last week's Gospel, on Lazarus and the rich man, we have five Gospels from the Gospel of Luke. We are in the season of Trinity, and having left the season of Easter, we move from the highly theological (and difficult)

post-Easter Gospels of John, teaching about the Trinity and the Holy Spirit, to the more simple Gospels of Luke.

The Trinity Season is green, a color that symbolizes the growth of the Church. Rooted in the important truths of Easter and Pentecost – that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father ruling all things for the sake of the Church, interceding for us, and giving out His good gifts – the Church grows from this root and “grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.” (Mark 4: 31)

What is the lifeblood of this tree? It is Jesus’ Words, the words we learn in the Gospels. And Luke’s Gospel – so focused on God’s mercy for the outcasts, the poor, and the sinner – provides an excellent foundation for this growth. The Church will provide shade for those who need mercy.

Today’s Gospel is a simple parable. A certain man gives a great supper. The image of the great supper draws from prophetic language found in Isaiah 25: 6-8: “And in this mountain The LORD of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken.”

Here we see that it is the Lord Who hosts the supper, and the supper celebrates the destruction of “the covering cast over all people,” that covering being the veil of death and judgment. This supper is clearly a reference to the Lord’s Supper, which is a proclamation of the Lord’s death (I Corinthians 11: 26), a death which ended our rebuke and destroyed death. As we confess just before receiving the great supper, “[Jesus] is the very Paschal Lamb which was offered for us and hath taken away the sins of the world;...by His death [He] hath destroyed death.” (See the Proper Preface.) That the prophecy refers to a feast of Lamb meat and wine only confirms the connection to the supper of the “Paschal Lamb” and the wine of Holy Communion.

The parable then states that “many” were invited. According to ancient custom, an invitation went out earlier, and then a messenger of the host would go out to get those who were invited. These who are first invited clearly refers to the Jews, to whom – as was the case in the prophecy we just read – the invitation first went out. But the invitation is not simply to the Jews as such, but by implication in the parable, to a select group of Jews. Presumably Jesus is talking about the religious leaders, those who should have understood and accepted the ancient invitation to the great banquet from such prophecies as that of Isaiah.

Jesus is the Servant whom God sends out to give the second invitation, the call that “all things are now ready.” Isaiah 42: 1, a prophecy about the baptism of Jesus, refers to Jesus as the Lord’s Servant. In this passage the Lord says “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”

The Greek word for “invite” is the same word for “call.” Thus, when we read, “He called you by our gospel” from II Thessalonians 2: 14, we know that such passages guide our understanding of the parable. That is, the work of the servant in calling out “all things are now ready” is the same as the work of the preacher today, calling out that the “supper is ready,” meaning, “Come to Holy Communion, because by Jesus’ work on the cross, resurrection, and ascension, it is now ready to deliver His victory to you, that you might share in this celebration!”

Nevertheless, many people do not heed this invitation. In the immediate context of the parable, the Jewish leaders – the money-hungry Pharisees and other religious leaders – have other things on their minds. They make excuses. These excuses, however, cover all excuses made throughout history. The excuses might be summarized as business and family excuses. The purchasing of land and animals, and marriage, prevent the men in the parable from heeding the invitation. Of the first two excuses, Jesus’ words, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses,” (Luke 12: 15) remind us of St. Paul’s words, that the love of money is the root of all evil (I Timothy 6: 10). How often do money concerns prevent people from hearing the Gospel, from going to church, or from taking the Gospel seriously! The third excuse – that of marriage – recalls Jesus’ words from Matthew 19: 29 that, “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.” The point being, as the hymn goes, “Goods, fame, child, and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won.” How often may family or the idolatry of family prevent a person from hearing the Gospel!

When the invitation is rejected, the man sends the servant out to gather the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind in from the streets and lanes of the city. This first “re-invitation” is only to those inside the city. Parabolically, this refers to the “unworthy” Jews, one of whom we heard about last week, Lazarus, and of whom we will hear more in the next several weeks. These are the Jews who need mercy, however that be defined.

There is still room in the great banquet hall, so the servant goes out again. This time he is sent outside of the city, into the highways and hedges. This refers to the gentiles, those “outside of Zion.”

The parable describes the great feast that is the Church, which gathers around the Word (the invitation) and the Sacrament (the great banquet). In this life, the great feast is one entered into by faith. In the life of the world to come, we will receive the object of this faith and participate in the great heavenly banquet (Revelation 19: 9).

Answer Key

Parable review from page 9-10:

1. A certain man gave a great supper...

What does this teach us about Jesus? *He hosts a supper.* What great supper does Jesus host? *The Lord's Supper.*

Read the following passage about the great supper that the Lord hosts. Underline and number the three things the Lord will do at this feast:

Isaiah 25: 6-8

The LORD of hosts will make a feast for all people...(1) He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord GOD will (2) wipe away tears from all faces; (3) The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken.

What does it mean that the Lord will take away the "rebuke of His people" from the earth? *His anger against them will end.*

2. ...and invited many...

Read the following passages and answer the questions below:

Whom does Jesus invite to His supper? *Sinners.*

How does He invite them? *By the Gospel.*

3. ...and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, "Come, for all things are now ready."

On Whom did the Lord put His Spirit? *His Son, Jesus.*

Who was exalted (lifted up) to the right hand of the Father? *His Son, Jesus.*

Who is the Servant Whom the Lord sends? *His Son, Jesus.*

4. ...But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused." And another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused." Still another said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come."

What kinds of things keep us from hearing the Gospel? *Money and love of family. Why? We love them more than the Gospel.*

5. ...So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind." And the servant said, "Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room." Then the master said to the servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper."

Whom does God choose to be invited to His great supper? *The poor.*

Matching on page 12: B, E, D, A, B, C, D, B.

Suggestions

1. Remind the children what a parable is. A parable is a story that teaches about Jesus and His kingdom. The story did not "really" happen. Give some examples of other parables.
2. Be specific about the relations between the parable and church. Every week, we are invited to go to church and be forgiven. The pastor, like Jesus, is the "servant of the Word" who is sent to make the invitation. The banquet to which we are invited is Holy Communion. Sinners are invited, and we are the sinners who are invited.
3. Discuss the reasons why people do not want to go to church, using the parable as a guide. How might family get in the way of coming to church? (Birthday sleep-overs, Sunday gatherings, etc.) How might love of money get in the way of coming to church? (Jobs on Sunday, etc.)
4. Review a bit about the curse of death that is over all people. It might be good to review the story of Adam and Eve and how their sin brought in the curse of death. The great banquet is a celebration that this curse is over.
5. Have the children learn and color the symbols of the four Gospels (in Activities folder, document titled *Trinity5Gospels*). There will be some work with the four gospels in the next several weeks. The children will learn what the four Gospels are, and they will learn how each gospel is unique in its own way.
6. In the

+ + +

The Lost Ones

| | |
|---|--|
| Week: The 3 rd Sunday after Trinity Story: The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin Text: Luke 15: 1-10 | Theme: Jesus seeks and finds those who were lost. |
|---|--|

Commentary

Two points are underscored in this Gospel. First, we see a strong case made for “divine monergism.” Second, we get in insight into some of the mysteries of election.

What exactly is “divine monergism”? Divine monergism is the teaching that our salvation is a one-sided event. God does all the work. Monergism is a word derived from two Greek words meaning “work alone.” Monergism is set against “synergism,” which is derived from two Greek words meaning “work together.” Does God do all the work, or do we work with God for our salvation?

Ask the coin! Did the coin do any work? Obviously not. Did the sheep do any work to be saved? Obviously not. To work with some subtle differences between the coin and the sheep, each teaches us about the nature of our inability to work with God. The coin teaches us that we are like inanimate objects when it comes to the Lord’s hunting of us. The sheep teaches us that we actually have an inner trajectory, which we call original sin, which steers us away from the Shepherd. We naturally err from the flock.

Divine monergism is among the most implicit teachings of Scripture that is most easily cast aside. Just about every image that is used to describe the nature of our salvation teaches divine monergism. Consider the following images: the seed, the new birth, the new creation, the talents gaining interest, the lost coin, and the lost sheep. In each of these images, the thing being acted upon is completely passive. Does the seed do work to grow? Does a baby do work to be born? Did Adam do work to be created? Does money do work to grow interest on its own? Of course not. So it is with our salvation. It is all God’s work.

However, as other images show us, such as that of the wedding banquet, the thing being acted upon does have the power to reject. Acceptance of God’s work is not our’s to claim, but yet we are totally responsible for our rejection.

Despite this implicit teaching, so many people speak as if their salvation was effected when they personally “accepted Jesus into their hearts” or “surrendered their hearts to Jesus.” Lutheran doctrine follows the teachings implicit in these images: God does all the work! The stories of the lost coin and the lost sheep only reaffirm this teaching.

The second point is quite subtle as well. Jesus says, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!” This parallels a later verse where He says, “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” We can gloss over the subtle point if we are not careful. Jesus came not to find that which “is” lost, but that which “was” lost. If something “was” lost, it no longer “is” lost. Jesus’ task, then, is not to find something that is still lost, but merely to go get that which has been found. What’s going on with this somewhat odd way of speaking?

It boils down to this: even as we were lost in Adam’s sin (Romans 5: 14), we have been found from the foundation of the world. We were chosen in Christ from the beginning (Ephesians 1: 4). When we are baptized, we are given that which we possessed from the beginning. It’s like a person who lost a wallet at a restaurant, and it was discovered by the waitress. The wallet is no longer lost, but for the person, until he is told that the wallet was found, it is as if it is still lost. So it is with us. We have been found, but through the Gospel and in baptism, we learn that we have been found from the foundation of the world.

Now, we do not run this doctrine in the way of Calvinism, which places our election in the providential choosing of the Lord, such that our election rests in God’s random act of choosing this person or rejecting that person. Rather, our election is rooted in the cross of Jesus Christ, where alone we are saved by the forgiveness of our sins. But didn’t Jesus’ death happen in time, at around 33 A.D. far later than the “foundation of the world”? Yes, but His death spans time, so that St. John in the Revelation can refer to the “Lamb which was slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13: 8). We are elect in Christ, and in Christ’s cross, which is to say that by Christ’s cross, we have been found long before we were born, from the foundation of the world. (This is not to say that Jesus is suffering continually from the foundation, or constantly being crucified, but merely to say that the benefits of His one-time death are established from the foundation. See Hebrews 9: 26).

This truth explains several passages in Scripture, for example, how St. Paul can say that the good works we do are works “which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2: 10). It explains how on Judgment Day, we will “inherit the kingdom prepared for [us] from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25: 34). In Christ, our salvation, our good deeds, our faith, our everything, has already been accomplished. By faith, we merely “walk” in what He has done. The day of our salvation, our conversion, follows this principle: when we were found, it was not as if we were previously lost. We are that which “was” lost, and have been found.

The Gospel for today climaxes in the liturgy, for when the coin and the sheep are discovered, there is rejoicing in heaven. Angels and archangels and all the company of heaven rejoice when Jesus has His meal with the “tax collectors and sinners.” It is not mere tradition or coincidence that in the liturgy, the canticles that are sung (both the *Gloria in Excelsis* and the *Sanctus*) are songs of angels. No, when sinners are found, heaven erupts in song. And what else is the liturgy than the great event of sinners being found, in the absolution, in the preaching of the Gospel, in Holy Communion? And finally, if the liturgy is the eruption of song in heaven rejoicing over sinners found – and sinners, as we discovered, have been found from the foundation – does that not imply that the liturgy is an event which transcends time? Indeed it does. The liturgy is timeless in this regard, which speaks against the transitoriness of so many worship trends in today’s age.

A point should also be made about Jesus’ language in referring to “that” which was lost rather than “he” or “they” who were lost. “That” implies a thing, and that thing is the world, or humanity. This point reminds us that Jesus’ mission was for the world, and it was for the world He died. The redeemed world is what we call the Kingdom of Heaven, or the

Church. In our day where personal salvation and individualism are so stressed, this small detail reminds us that salvation is very much a community affair, even as we (even when we pray individually) pray “our” Father, and even as the subjects in today’s Gospel are a plurality of “sinners and tax collectors.”

Answer Key

Questions on pages 13-14:

1. What kind of people were coming to Jesus? *Sinners and tax collectors.*
2. Why were they coming to Jesus? *To hear His Word.*
3. Why did the Pharisees and scribes complain? *Because Jesus receiving them and eating with them.*
4. Jesus tells two parables about things that are lost. What were the two things that got lost? *A sheep and a coin.*
5. How hard do the shepherd and the woman search for what was lost? *Very!*
6. What do the shepherd and the woman do when they found what was lost? *The call their friends and neighbors and rejoice.*
7. Who is the One Who searches for us? *Jesus.*
8. How hard does Jesus search for us? *Very!*
9. What happens in heaven when one sinner repents? *The angels rejoice.*

Definition of what a sinner is (page 14): *A sinner is someone who breaks God’s Law.*

What sinners may have heard from Jesus (page 14): *Your sins are forgiven.*

Four Situations on page 15:

- 1st Situation: Jesus received sinners and ate with them.
- 2nd Situation: We cannot seek and find Jesus. We are like coins, or like sheep who wander away from Him.
- 3rd Situation: The woman and the shepherd did not stop until they found what was lost. Jesus does not ever give up looking for us.
- 4th Situation: There is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents.

Multiple Choice on page 16: U, R, C, C, H, H. Unscrambled, it spells “Church.”

Suggestions

1. Spend some time going over the canticles of the church which are the songs of angels. The *Gloria in Excelsis* comes from Luke 2: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill, toward men. The *Sanctus* comes from Isaiah 6: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth. Both songs are songs of angels, and they are rejoicing over the forgiveness that the Lord gives us. Teach the children that these songs are the angels singing for joy that we have been forgiven.
2. Emphasize how Jesus does all the seeking. Emphasize that coins have NO ability to find anything and how sheep cannot find their way back. This is why the children were saved when they were baptized. They did not do anything to be saved, but like a coin, they were found by the Lord in baptism.
3. Find a picture of Jesus, the Good Shepherd in the church somewhere. By way of note, it is from this Gospel, and not from John 10, that we learn that Jesus puts the sheep on His shoulders. See if there are pictures of Jesus leading the sheep (based on John 10) versus pictures of Jesus with a lamb on His shoulders (from today’s Gospel). Explain the difference to the children.
4. Have the children do the maze in the activities book. The correct path will spell out the words of the angels which celebrate the forgiveness of sins: “Peace on earth and goodwill toward men.”

+ + +

As Your Father is Merciful

Week: The 4th Sunday after Trinity
Story: As Your Father is Merciful
Text: Luke 6: 36-42

Theme: Jesus teaches us to be merciful as our Father is merciful.

Commentary

We lose sight of today’s Gospel if we disconnect it from the first verse, verse 36: “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.” Our mercy toward others is patterned after the Father’s mercy toward us. The Gospel of Luke especially reveals the full extent of this mercy in Jesus Christ, how He had mercy on the sinner, the sick, the poor, and even the dead. In many ways, this Gospel lays the foundation for the season of Trinity, many of whose Gospels come from the Gospel of Luke.

The point is, we are mistaken if we see the Gospel (Gospel, that is, in the broad sense, as the good news of our salvation) merely as an insurance plan. We see the Gospel as an insurance plan when we think, "Just to be safe, I'd better get baptized and go to church now and then to get forgiveness." No, the Gospel embraces us completely into a new way of thinking, for we have become a new creation. Part of that new way of thinking means that we look with mercy upon those who need mercy, even as the Father looks upon us in mercy.

By derivation, looking at the rest of the Gospel according to the pattern set in this first verse, we should understand exactly what our Father is like. He is not only merciful, but He judges not, condemns not, forgives, gives, and gives fully out of His bosom. Where we sin, He does not judge and condemn us, but sent His Son to die for our forgiveness. Where we deserve death and hell, He gives us eternal life. He gives out of the fullness of His bosom.

Who comes from the Father's bosom? Jesus Christ (cf. John 1: 18). He gives us Jesus Christ fully, Who Himself gave fully from His bosom on the cross, where water and blood burst forth for our life and forgiveness.

(Building off this previous point, a central teaching of the Trinity could be missed if the Gospel is not read carefully. Jesus first says, "Be merciful as your Father is merciful." And then teaches, "Every [disciple]...will be like his teacher [Jesus]." So which is it, does Jesus want us to be like the Father, or like the Teacher, that is, Himself? It's a silly question when we realize that Jesus and the Father are one, as we teach concerning the Holy Trinity.)

Part of our new, sanctified life means that we, too, will give out of the fullness of our bosom. That is, from the overflow of God's mercy to us, we will in turn show mercy to others, both in body (through charity and acts of kindness) and in soul (through forgiveness). As many other Gospels show (for example, the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, from Matthew 18), how can we not be merciful to others once God has been merciful to us? This is the very love we pray will be worked after we receive God's mercy in Holy Communion, when we pray that His gifts will inspire "fervent love for one another."

Today's Gospel also amplifies for us something from the Gospel of Matthew that often confuses many Christians. In Matthew's version of today's Gospel, Jesus says, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus says these words in the context of His teaching on loving enemies. Luke's Gospel sheds some light on these words. Stripped out of context, Jesus' words from Matthew sound like an impossible demand for moral purity and ethical rectitude. We envision the Father sitting on His throne of glory in the heavens. He sits in perfect and absolute holiness, distant and removed from the sins and imperfections of this world. But in the context of Jesus' other words from the Gospel of Luke, we learn what it means to "be perfect." It means to be merciful. How is the Father perfect? By being merciful, by loving His enemies, by giving gifts even to the evil, by "dirtying" His hands and coming into this fallen and imperfect world. That's how our Father is perfect; He is perfect through Jesus Christ and His work of saving us.

Jesus simply teaches us that we also should bear the image of the Father in our lives, such that we behave mercifully toward others. This goal of divine perfection – or Fatherly mercy – is a daily calling, something we strive for through the daily "transforming" of our minds (cf. Romans 12). The work of the Gospel is a lifelong exhortation to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave [us]" (Ephesians 4: 32), and as we live out this forgiveness, we show ourselves to be responding to the work of the ministry, which edifies and builds us into the "perfect man," Christ Jesus (cf. Ephesians 4: 13).

Answer Key

Unscrambled words on page 17:

- (1) *Merciful.*
- (2) *Does not judge.*
- (3) *Does not condemn*
- (4) *Forgives.*
- (5) *Gives.*

Questions on page 18:

1. My sister called me a name. *We would forgive her and not call her a name back.*
2. I see a criminal on the news. My friend says, "What an awful person! He should go to hell!" *We would not judge or condemn him, but remind the friend that Jesus has forgiven us.* [This doesn't mean the person should not go to jail!]
3. My church is collecting money to feed the poor during Lent. *I do what I can to give money, but do it with a clean heart.*

Our Merciful Father, page 18 (The Parable of the Prodigal Son is from Luke 15: 10, after the stories of the lost coin and lost sheep.)

A definition of original sin (page 19): *The sin that we are born with, that we received from Adam and Eve. We die because of original sin.*

Situations on page 20:

1. What does Righteous Rachel have in her eye? *A plank.*
2. What exactly does today's Gospel say about Gregory's situation? *He should forgive him as he has been forgiven.*
How should Gregory deal with his little brother's lies? *He should take the plank out of his own eye first, and then*

take the speck out of his brother's eye.

Word Search (page 20): (1) blind, (2) original, (3) mercy, (4) judge, (5) Lamb, (6) plank, speck, (7) hypocrite.

Suggestions

1. It may be a good idea to tell the parable of the unforgiving servant (found in Matthew 18: 21-35) to teach the Gospel for today, the point being, how can we not forgive others after we have been forgiven much?
2. Explain what *mercy* means. Children will not immediately understand this term. First, point out in the church service how often the word is used. Then use some examples from Scripture where people cry, "Lord, have mercy!" (For example, the blind men, or sinners.) Finally, explain that mercy is when God has pity on us because we have fallen. Give some general examples, like if a child has mercy on a bird that has hit a glass window and tries to nurse it back to health, or if a child takes in a stray dog.
3. Also explain the words "judge" and "condemn." Let the children know that a judge is not a bad person; judges are supposed to "judge" criminals who are guilty. Jesus is talking about judging people to hell because of their sins. Jesus has died for all sins, even those of criminals. Explain that "condemn" means to wish hell on someone. This goes against the second commandment, for only the Lord has the authority to condemn anyone, and He only does so if someone rejects His grace, since Jesus has died for the sins of the whole world.
4. The children may do the Level 1 activity from the activities book. They will cut out the squares and assemble them like a puzzle. Then they will fill out the quote bubble and place it over the image (which is of angels singing).
5. They can also do the activity that uses the symbols of the gospels. If they follow the key, the squares colored red will emerge with the word, "Luke." Many of the gospels we are working on during summer will be from the Gospel of Luke.

+ + +

At Your Word

| | |
|--|---|
| Week: The 5 th Sunday after Trinity Story: At Your Word Text: Luke 5: 1-11 | Theme: Jesus teaches about the power and ministry of His Word. |
|--|---|

Commentary

In both the Gospels of Matthew and the Gospels of Luke, the point must be made that Jesus' Word carries with it authority. The issue of authority can be overlooked by the modern reader. We grant authority to the words of another by different standards than they did in Jesus' day. Our standards have to do often with education or charisma; we ascribe authority to those who are experts in their field (for example, a doctor), or to those who carry themselves charismatically (for example, a politician). Less important in determining authority is tradition; we tend to scoff at those who claim authority because "it's always been this way before."

The situation was the opposite in Jesus' day. Tradition meant everything. A rabbi's words meant nothing if his teaching could not be derived from some previous authoritative rabbi, whose words also came from someone before *him*, whose words ultimately went back to Moses. Because Jesus was in fact a rabbi, but one whose words seemingly went against even Moses' teaching (cf. Matthew 5: 27-28), it was so important for the evangelists to establish Jesus' authority by other means than by tradition.

Matthew, in His Gospel, launches right into Jesus' words (in the Sermon on the Mount) and then makes the case for Jesus' authority afterwards, by showing how the crowds reacted (Matthew 7: 29), and then by showing His authority by way of miracles (a point which makes the centurion's words about authority so critically important to Matthew's structure; cf. Matthew 8: 9).

Luke has the same goal, but does it through slightly different means, almost in reverse. Luke does not have major teaching from Jesus until later in the Gospel (chapter 6), but first seeks to establish Jesus' authority to do so through His miracles. And so in chapter four we have these two statements about Jesus' authority: "And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority." (Luke 4: 32) and "Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, 'What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.'" (Luke 4: 36)

The Gospel for today is nestled in these early chapters, in which it is so important to establish the authority of Jesus' Word. We learn right off the bat that "the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God." The point should not be missed: *to hear Jesus is to hear the word of God!* If that is not authority, what is? And this explains why people were "pressed about" to hear Him. If a man is the mouthpiece of the Word of God, would we not also want to "press about" that man?

Whether it serves to make a bigger point or whether the exigencies of the situation demanded it, Jesus got into a boat to teach the multitudes, and this action indeed served a bigger point. The point is that Jesus, by His teaching, is a fisher of men. This is why He is in the boat. The lake is teeming with people, and Jesus “catches” them by the Word.

But His Word is not the Word of a mere man. Men like Peter are mere men. Pete confessed as much when he said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” Because Peter is a mere man, all his work – even if he toils all night! – is subject to the arbitrary dictates of a fallen world. He toiled all night and caught nothing. Peter, a mere man, was nevertheless a mere man who also happened to be an expert in his particular field, fishing. Yet all his expertise was not enough to gain him a catch of fish. His expert authority was not enough.

When Jesus asks Jesus to lower the net again, Peter could have resorted to his expertise and refused the order. He could have said, “Jesus, what do you know about fishing? I’m the expert! I know that the fish just aren’t out there!” But Peter responds with words of humility, “At your word, I will let down the net.” And he caught the huge catch of fish, such that the nets began breaking.

The lessons of this Gospel are many, glorious, and simple. Jesus, by getting in a boat, shows Himself to be a fisherman in the delivery of His Word (which is God’s Word, meaning, Jesus is God). Jesus’ Word also grants authority to those to whom He gives it, namely, His disciples. An apostle like Peter may toil all night long, but not without the authority of Jesus’ Word will he himself catch men as Jesus did.

The lessons for today should not be missed. In a modern world where authority is in fact so often a function of expertise or technical skills, where “church growth” is something that is said to happen only through the proper mixture of “toiling all night” and good technique, we remember that our nets will only burst “at Jesus’ Word.”

Allegorically, we can play with some of the elements of this Gospel. For example, why fish? Of all the images that Jesus could use to describe those drawn into the Church, why did He pick fish? This image was an image of no passing referent; one of the first and singular images of the Christian Church was that of the *Ichthus*, the fish. Is there more that can be derived from this Gospel? What do we learn about ourselves, who in the Gospel make our showing through the image of the fish?

First off, again, we learn something of the divine monergism which we learned two Gospels ago. And here, we should emphasize the difference between net fishing and bait fishing. We are not lured into salvation like some bait-and-switch tactic of a craftily marketed church. Rather, we wander into the net. One imagines that a fish caught in a net comes upon his fate quite accidentally, passively as it were. So it is with us. We are caught in the net of our baptisms almost as if accidentally (not from God’s perspective but perhaps from our perspective; why us, for example, but not our neighbor?) As we confess in our confessional writings, the Holy Spirit works faith “where and when He pleases.”

Second, when we place the image of the fish-in-the-sea in the full context of the Old Testament, more nuance emerges. The sea, or “the deep”, is a symbol of the judgment of God, the judgment of sin, death, and the devil. It is from the deep that we are saved. Meanwhile, the boat, or the ark, is the Church into which we are hauled, so that we might be saved from the judgment of the deep. To insert a modern allegory, when we are hauled in from the sea, we will feel like “fish out of water,” and we most certainly will need a new method of breathing, a “new spirit” as it were. So it is with our new birth. A Christian, upon salvation, is hauled in from the watery death that baptism effects, and is given the new spirit that baptism also involves.

Answer Key

Questions on page 21:

1. The multitude pressed about Jesus to hear the Word.
2. Jesus taught the multitude from a fishing boat.
3. After preaching, Jesus told Peter to launch out into the deep and cast their nets for a catch.
4. Simon said, "We have toiled all night and caught nothing."
5. Then Simon said, "Nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net."
6. Then the disciples caught a great number of fish.
7. Simon Peter said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"
8. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men."

Questions on page 22:

1. Why did the people press about Jesus to hear His Word? *Because His Word is the Word of God. What is special about the Word of Jesus? It is the Word of God; it is merciful and gracious.*
2. What point was Jesus making by preaching from a fishing boat? How is preaching the Gospel like fishing? *Because the preacher catches men by the word.*
3. Peter worked all night and caught nothing. Who is the One Who makes it possible for Peter to catch fish? *The Lord.*
4. Simon Peter said "At your Word, I will let down the net." What have we learned about Jesus' Word? Whose Word is it? *The Word of the Lord.*

Checks on page 22-23: 2, 3, 6, 8.

Diagram on page 23 (from top to bottom): c, a, b, e, d.

Questions on page 23:

1. Why are we compared to fish? *We are saved from the water.*
2. Do we "come out of the water" when we are caught by Jesus' Word? If so, where? *Holy Baptism.*
3. Do the fish do anything to be caught? Do we do anything to be caught by the Word? *No, we do nothing.*
4. What is the Word of Jesus that catches us? *The Word that we are forgiven.* How does it catch us? *It creates faith in God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.*
5. Who is the fisher of men today that catches fish in our church? *The minister.*

Ichthus activity (page 24): (1) E, (2) D, (3) C, E, (4) R. *Unscrambled, it spells out CREED.*

Suggestions

1. Emphasize the difference between lure fishing and net fishing. Point out that the way we are saved is definitely NOT by lure fishing. Give some situations and see how the children respond. For example, say the church lured people to church by offering Snickers bars, and then when they got to church, they told them about the Gospel. Is this how the fish are caught in today's Gospel? Were people pressing to hear Jesus because He offered them Snickers bars?
2. Review how every day we "drown our old Adams" in our baptisms. In other words, every day we are "caught" by God's Word and hauled into the boat.
3. Some time might be spent explaining why the people were pressing to hear Jesus. He spoke God's Word, but it is also the content of that Word that people desperately wanted to hear. Based on the previous Gospels, what perhaps was that Word? It was the Gospel of forgiveness and mercy from the Heavenly Father.
4. If there are pictures or symbols in the church related to fish or fishing, the children might take a field trip to see such symbols. Likely they will be on banners or paraments, or perhaps on the pulpit.
5. The children may do the activity in the activities book. The second activity has 16 rectangles with numbers on them. The children will cut these out and glue them in order. Then they will fold them together like a fan. If the image is looked at from one side, it will show a fish and the word "ΙΧΘΥΣ," Greek for "Ichthus," meaning "fish." If they look at it from the other side, it will say what the Ichthus means, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

+ + +

The Righteousness of Jesus

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Week: The 6th Sunday after Trinity Story: The Righteousness of Jesus Text: Matthew 5: 20-26</p> | <p>Theme: Jesus fulfills our righteousness before the Heavenly Father.</p> |
|--|---|

Commentary

In many ways, today's Gospel underscores teachings from the previous two Gospels. For example, the first five words – "For I say to you" – teach one of the points from last week's Gospel, that Jesus' Word has the authority of God Himself. "For I say to you" is set in juxtaposition from "you have heard that it was said." "You have heard that it was said" is the word of tradition, a tradition going back to Moses. Jesus, while not going against this word (cf. Matthew 5: 17-19, the text just before today's Gospel), teaches that His word "exceeds" it: "For I say to you." Not "Rabbi So and So says such and such," but "I say to you." Whose word but that of God exceeds the teaching of Moses himself?

Like the Gospel from two weeks ago, we see the pertinent teaching of today's Gospel, that the Christian message is one of reconciliation and peace, reconciliation and peace that first begins with Jesus' mercy toward us, in reconciling us to the Father and in creating peace between us and God.

To understand today's teaching, we must look at the teaching about righteousness in the greater context of the Gospel of Matthew. We learn, for example, early on that Joseph was a "righteous man" because he did not subject Mary to public humiliation, but was going to divorce her secretly. In other words, righteousness is related to mercy. In chapter 3, we see that Jesus insists that John baptize Him, so that they may "fulfill all righteousness." Righteousness, then, is something that has already been fulfilled for us in Christ Jesus, Who involves Himself in something reserved mainly for sinners (that is, baptism). In the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount (chapter 5), we learn that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. That is, righteousness is something that we do not attain by our own acts, but is something with which we are filled, something for which we hunger and thirst. Later in the Gospel, we learn that Jesus fills those who follow Him with bread, and we also learn that Jesus' Person and work are often related to bread. Jesus and His righteousness are thus related to bread. And finally, at the institution of Holy Communion, all these threads are woven together, and Jesus gives us forgiveness (mercy) in His Body and Blood, the very thing for which we hunger and thirst.

This is Jesus' righteousness. At the altar, God the Father is reconciled to us because of the sacrifice of Jesus' Body and Blood for us. At the altar, God, the righteous One, has mercy on us and does not subject us to public humiliation. At the altar, the Lord does not look down upon us, crying out "Raca!" No, He refrains from His justifiable anger and wrath, having placed it on His Son in our place. As Psalm 85 says, "You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have

covered all their sin. You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger.” All this happens at the altar, and so the Lord would have us reflect the events of the altar to one another before going there: “First be reconciled to your brother” before going to the altar.

This is exactly what we pray for in the collect for this Sunday: “Lord of all power and might, who is the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”

We will not fulfill Jesus’ righteousness on our own. No, only by the Lord, the true Author and Giver of ALL good things (such as the power to reconcile to brothers) will we have the love of His name by which we have true religion. What is true religion? According to St. James, it is exactly what Jesus teaches in today’s Gospel: To bridle the tongue and give mercy to those needing it (cf. James 1: 26-28). We do not pray for things that we can answer on our own. No, only the Lord can graft into our hearts true religion. We, rather, have the hunger and thirst for righteousness with which Jesus fills us. This same hunger and thirst drives our prayer and our confession, and it is satisfied through the preaching of the Gospel.

The marks of a Christian described in today’s Gospel – peace, kindness, reconciliation – will not be noted by the Christian himself. He will only see himself as one in a constant state of hunger, thirst, and need for Jesus’ righteousness. But on Judgment Day, these works will be revealed as having been worked in Christ.

Answer Key

Questions on page 25:

1. Whose must our righteousness be greater than? *The scribes and Pharisees.*
2. Go over the Ten Commandments. Circle the commandment that Jesus teaches about:
(5) Thou shalt not kill.
3. Does Jesus make this commandment easier or harder to follow? *Harder.*
4. What did Jesus teach about this commandment? *That if we are angry, call a brother names, or look down at him, we are breaking the commandment.*
5. Did Jesus Himself do what He taught? *Yes. How? He forgave His enemies; He gave peace to His disciples; He never looked down at anyone.*

Question on page 26:

Who is the one Person who has never done these things? *Jesus.*

Multiple Choice on pages 31-32: c, c, b.

Diagram on page 28:

1. Which kind of righteousness gets us to heaven? Which righteousness is greater? The righteousness on the right, based on Jesus’ death.
2. Whose righteousness is this? Jesus’ righteousness.
3. Which righteousness requires work? *The kind on the left.* Which requirement requires faith? *The kind on the right.*
4. Which righteousness answers the prayer of the collect for the day? *The kind on the right.* How so? *Because on the left, the man is answering his own prayer, achieving goodness on his own. The righteousness on the right is all what Jesus has done for us, grafting into our hearts the goodness for which we pray.*
5. Will anyone ever be saved by obeying the Law? *No.*
6. Which man has more joy, the one on the left or the one on the right? *The one on the right.*
7. Which man is trying hard to get something he will never get? *The one on the left.*
8. Which man will more likely be grateful, and so be happy to love others? *The one on the right.*

Suggestions

1. Explain reconciliation. It is when we are made at peace with another. Give an example of reconciliation, for example, two boys arguing over a foul while playing basketball. One claims to be fouled, the other says he didn’t foul. They fight and argue. To be reconciled is to be made at peace. Give other situations in which the children might learn how they would be reconciled. Also, however, give examples where reconciliation ought not occur (as Jesus Himself says that He has come with a sword, to divide people). Such examples would include if, say, a friend said, “I’m not going to be your friend unless you stop going to that church.” Consider some other examples.
2. Point out that Jesus talks about anger “without a cause.” In other words, there is angry that has a justifiable cause. Discuss what sort of anger this might be. Use Jesus’ example as a guide, for example, when He was angry at the money-changers in the temple, or when He was angry at faithlessness.
3. Talk a bit about “Raca!” “Raca!” is a term of contempt, of looking down at another while spitting at them. Discuss how “Raca!” would play out today. We might call it “looking down our nose” at someone else, or being snooty.
4. Explain what “brother” means in the bible. All Christians are brothers and sisters because we are all children of the Heavenly Father through baptism. In baptism we are born again, therefore we are all related spiritually.
5. Carefully go over the Ten Commandments for the sake of the children. This may be their first exposure to them.

- Explain words like “covet” and “false witness.”
6. Have them do the activity, in which they will first write out “what has been heard before” in the Ten Commandments, and then have them write out what Jesus says unto them. Jesus practiced what He preached on the cross, where He loved His enemies, forgave them, and did not look down upon them. Also, when He arose, Jesus appeared to His disciples (the coloring picture for Level 1, which they may also do) and gave them peace. His disciples all abandoned Him and treated Him with contempt, yet He forgave them and gave them peace. That’s Jesus’ righteousness!

+ + +

Blessed Bread for All

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Week: The 7th Sunday after Trinity Story: Blessed Bread for All Text: Mark 8: 1-9</p> | <p>Theme: Through Jesus, God provides for all, Jew and Gentile.</p> |
|--|--|

Commentary

Today’s Gospel is the feeding of the 4,000. The feeding of the 4,000 is often seen as a gentile counterpoint to the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6: 34-44), which seems to be more specifically for Jews. Several details in the story lead to this conclusion.

In the feeding of the 5,000, the people came from the “surrounding country and villages,” meaning it was within the boundaries of the land of Israel. In the feeding of the 4,000, Jesus commanded the people to sit in ranks, in hundreds and fifties, even as Israel left Egypt in ranks (Exodus 13: 18). This story mentions that Jesus made the people sit down on green grass, calling to mind the highly beloved Hebrew image of the Shepherd of Psalm 23, who “makes me to lie down in green pastures.” The twelve baskets of leftovers suggest the twelve tribes of Israel. The implicit message given the apostles is that this Jesus can provide not just for the 5,000, but for all the twelve tribes of Israel. A final Jewish element in the story may be the five loaves of bread that Jesus used. As we learn later in the Gospel of Mark, leaven and bread are a symbols for teaching. If this is the case, then the five loaves may represent the five books of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, so critical to the Jews as part of their catechetical program. Jesus takes this teaching (this bread) and expands it miraculously, bringing it to its full fruition.

By contrast, in the feeding of the 4,000, the people had been with Jesus for three days, and some had come from afar, presumably from distant, gentile lands. The key number in this story is seven. Jesus uses seven loaves of bread and seven baskets are left over. Seven is the number of universality and fulfillment, meaning, Jesus’ message is not just for the Jews, but for the universal realm of the whole world.

The similarities between the two stories demonstrate that a new dispensation has come upon God’s people. Jew and Gentile will now be in one Church. What are these similarities? They are the following: (1) the location of the feeding in the wilderness, showing that the Christian Church is in a pilgrimage in the wilderness of this world (cf. Revelation 12); (2) Jesus’ compassion to feed the people, revealing God as a compassionate Savior for all; (3) the blindness of the disciples, demonstrating that faith in Jesus’ ability to provide for us is a daily struggle; (4) Jesus’ order of the people to sit down, teaching that Psalm 23’s Good Shepherd imagery is for all people; (5) the eucharistic language of the consecration (took bread...blessed/gave thanks...broke them...gave them to the disciples), confessing the one communion of the Church; and (6) the satiety of the people, indicating that Jesus alone feeds us fully (with his righteousness, cf. Matthew 5: 6).

A point might be further embellished about bread. One of the favored images in the early church was the image of diverse grains of wheat coming together through water and yeast in order to become one, expanded bread. In many ways, the image is beautiful as an explanation of the Church, and it draws off of much biblical language, especially from the parables. Each Christian is a small seed (Matthew 13: 31) which is harvested (Matthew 9: 37-38) by the preaching of the Word. By the Holy Spirit, in the preaching of Law and Gospel, Jesus winnows the seed, separating the seed from the chaff (Matthew 3: 12). Yeast is added to the flour (Matthew 13: 33) in order to expand it; this yeast is the teaching and Word of Jesus (Matthew 16: 11-12). Together, many grains become one loaf, and this is at Holy Communion (1 Corinthians 10: 17). Jesus is the first seed of grain, Whose death gave rise to more seeds of grain (us), each of whom must also die in baptism before rising to produce our own fruit in Christ (cf. John 12: 24-26, Romans 6: 3, John 15: 5). Not stated, but implicit, is the idea that without water, you cannot make flour (us) and yeast (Jesus’ Word) come together as a rising dough. Thus it is water combined with God’s Word that causes the Church (the one bread) to rise. What does the rising entail? It entails geographical expansion, as the Church extends throughout the globe. It entails ethical expansion, as the Church has always been the main force in human rights and works of charity. It entails mass salvation, as billions of people have come to faith through the Church.

There are two other details in the story of the feeding of the 4,000 which are not so clearly explicable. In the feeding of the 5,000, the Greek word for basket denotes a smaller basket carried on the head. In the feeding of the 4,000, the baskets are large, carried over the shoulder or by the hand. The second detail is that of the fish. In the feeding of the

5,000, there are two fish. In the feeding of the 4,000, there are a “few” fish. The fish imagery, in general, recalls the “fisher of men” Gospel reviewed above; what was stated about grain in the above paragraph could then likewise be stated about the fish; both are foods that are harvested, brought into the Church by the preacher/fisherman/farmer. But why two in one case, and a “few” in the other? Perhaps in the first case – that of the two fish – Jesus is calling to mind the two kingdoms of God’s people in the Old Testament, Judah and Israel. And in the latter case – that of the “few” fish – Jesus is leaving ambiguous the total number of present and future gentile peoples that will come into the Church.

As for the baskets, perhaps the connotation is nothing more than the truth that the total amount of fragments left over in both feedings is the same. That is, twelve times a smaller basket roughly equals seven times a larger basket. Jesus might be making the point that it is not as if the Jews are receiving more bread, or more blessing, than the gentiles. If one runs with that point, a subtle truth can be mediated upon, that though God’s blessings are given under different forms that appear to give favor to one, in fact, He always satisfies and still gives leftovers, which end up being equally blessed for all.

Answer Key

Questions on page 29:

1. What does it mean that Jesus had compassion on the people? *He felt sorry for them and wanted to help them.*
2. The disciples asked, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?" What is the answer to this question? *Jesus could give them all they needed.*
3. How many loaves did Jesus use to feed all these people? *Seven.*
4. What did Jesus do with the bread and fish before giving it out? *He took it, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples.*
5. How many baskets of fragments of bread were left over? *Seven.*

What are they hungry for (questions on page 31):

1. What might Emily be hungry for? *A bus.*
2. What was this dog hungry for? *Love.*
3. What is Cassandra hungry for? *Healing.*

What is Kyle hungry for? (page 31) *Forgiveness.*

Comparison with words from Holy Communion (page 32):

And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples saying, "Take eat; this is My Body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

List of things in collage (page 32): *Eyes, ears, limbs, senses, mind, shoes, clothing, food, drink, house, spouse, children, livestock, land.* (List of items from Small Catechism under the first article of the Creed.)

Suggestions

1. Some time might be spent talking about the role of bread. Read after today’s Gospel, in Mark 8: 10-21, to learn how Jesus’ Word is a leavening agent, that causes flour (with water) to expand enough to feed a multitude. In the same way, His Word gathers each Christian together into one ever-growing loaf, the Church. Teach the children about the process of bread-making, from harvest, to winnowing, to milling, to mixing (yeast, flour, and water), to kneading, and to baking. See if the children can make the connections to how we are gathered into the Church.
How are we harvested? By the preaching of the Word.
How are we winnowed? By the Holy Spirit through Law and Gospel.
What is the yeast and water added to us? Jesus’ Word and Holy Baptism.
What is the one loaf where we are brought together? Holy Communion in the Body of Christ.
What is the expansion that happens? Our fruits of faith; the victory of eternal salvation.
2. Stress the theme of God’s providence through Jesus Christ. Teach that we look to God to provide everything we need of body and soul. The story of the feeding of the 4,000 actually teaches us this quite radically. There is no role for human cooperation. The people in the story merely sit down and get fed. Jesus does all the work, through His apostles, not unlike what happens Sunday morning.
3. The children might work on a collage of their own (as Level 3 may be doing). Have them cut out pictures of the things that God provides for them.
4. Explain the difference between Jews and gentiles. This may be a bit involved, because it involves ideas of ancestry (from Jacob) and race. Teach that the Old Testament was about the people of Israel, who all came from Jacob. Those people are called Jews. Most Christians are not Jews, but Jesus was a Jew, and all His disciples were Jews. Use the illustration of a family tree to explain it, and teach how gentiles have been grafted in.
5. Have the children make their own collage. In the activities book are 8 cut out cards with the words of what God the Father has given us, from the Small Catechism. Cut out the list. Bring several magazines that may have these items

in them. Have the children cut them out and paste them on a board in a collage. Paste the word cards on top of the collage or on the side, so that people can see the list of the words. Hang the board somewhere where adults can see it and be reminded of what they memorized in catechism.

+ + +

Beware of False Prophets

Week: The 8th Sunday after Trinity
Story: Beware of False Prophets
Text: Matthew 7: 15-23

Theme: Jesus warns against false preachers who come in sheep's clothing and teaches us how to recognize them.

Commentary

There are many "Lutheran dualities" that emerge from the Gospels of the Church Year, such as the Law/Gospel duality or the Divine/Human duality. Another duality that we see is that of Hearer/Preacher. As we teach in our Lutheran Confessions, the Church consists of hearers and a preacher. Some Gospels such as the "fisher of men" Gospel focus more on the preacher and his authority derived from Christ. Other Gospels such as the feeding of the 4,000 focus more on the gifts and the recipients of those gifts, the hearers. Still, if a Gospel emphasizes one, the other is still present. In the "fisher of men" passage, the hearer is present in the fish. In the feeding of the 4,000 passage, the preacher is present in the apostles' task of distributing the bread and fish. Today's Gospel is one that specifically teaches about preachers, how the hearers might distinguish between true and false preachers.

The exact word that Jesus uses is "prophet," but we need to understand that a prophet is simply someone who proclaims God's Word, and that is a preacher. In our minds, we distinguish between a prophet – as one who receives God's Word immediately, without means – and a preacher – as one who receives God's word mediately, through the study of Scriptures. This distinction did not exist in Jesus' day. If Jesus is God, the "mediate/immediate" distinction is erased. If Jesus gives, say, St. Peter a word to preach, did Peter receive that word immediately or mediately? After all, Jesus is the "God's Word made flesh." By Jesus' Divine Nature, Peter received it immediately – straight from God. By Jesus' Human Nature, Peter received it mediately, through the human means of Jesus' spoken Word and fleshly mouth. But because Jesus is One Person, with a Divine and Human nature, such distinctions are effectively erased. Thus, a prophet is a preacher and a preacher is a prophet. Both have received their word straight from God through the Person of Jesus Christ. For this reason, Revelation 19: 10 says, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." It is this testimony that marks true prophecy, and testimony is exactly what preachers are called to do (I Corinthians 2: 1-2). As a preacher today sits down in his study to meditate on the Word of Jesus in the Gospel, He is sitting at Jesus' feet as a prophet directly receiving the Word of God. By virtue of his call, he steps into the pulpit as a prophet sent from God.

That having been said, today's Gospel is speaking about false preachers. This point needs to be made because our ears are not as alerted to "false prophet" as they are to "false preacher." We hear "false prophet" and we think about false prophets in the Bible. But we need to hear "false preacher" and remember that there are many false preachers in the Church today, as there have been throughout the history of the Church. Over and over again, the Church is warned against false preachers and teachers. Here is given a review of passages which helps us understand the pathology of false prophets and false prophecy:

(1) St. Peter writes, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." (II Peter 2: 1)

Here, we see the motivation behind false teaching, which is *covetousness*, the lust for something, be it money, power, prestige, fame, or even sex. They use *deceptive words*, hiding the truth or giving only parts of it. They bring in *heresies*, which is a word meaning "divisions." Their words divide not along truth/falsehood lines but along lines of party spirit, cliques, or class. That is, their teachings probably at some point arrange people by ethnic categories, or by arbitrary standards of moral purity, or by other human categories. The true Gospel only arranges people in two categories, believers and unbelievers.

(2) Jesus teaches in Matthew 24: 24, "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." St. Paul reiterates this point in II Thessalonians 2: 9, "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders."

What appears as an "angel of light" (II Corinthians 11: 14), is in fact a deceiving demon. Therefore, in our day, the simple report of a miracle should not have Christians scrambling toward the preacher who performs it. In fact, Jesus teaches that the blessed faith is that which believes without seeing (John 20: 29).

(3) In Luke 6: 26 Jesus says, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false

prophets.”

When the world speaks well of a certain teacher or preacher claiming to proclaim the Christian message, the Christian ought to be alerted to his false prophecy. A true preacher will never be spoken well of by the world, and for that matter, may not be spoken well of by Christians insofar as the sinful flesh even of Christians always recoils at the hearing of the Word of God. Even among Christians, a true prophet will always have a tenuous foundation, as St. Paul had among the Corinthians, or Isaiah had among the Jews. To be sure, the renewed spirit within a Christian will embrace a true preacher fully, but the sinful flesh of the Christian will always strive to be in rebellion. In practical terms, this means that a preacher should be alerted if his message becomes too “fleshly,” appealing to his hearer’s “fleshly” desires. Likewise, hearers should not get gushy about preachers who traffic in sentiment and jokes that appeal to fleshly lusts. Such preachers are certainly “spoken well of,” but they are not true prophets of the Word of God. The Word of God is a sword, not a honeycomb.

(4) St. John writes, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” (I John 4: 1-3)

Two things we learn from this passage. First, false prophets are many. Lest we think that every preacher is “basically a good person,” St. John reminds us that in fact, there are a great number of false preachers. Second, we learn that false prophets will deny the coming of Jesus in the flesh. Fleshing out this statement requires a book’s-worth of teaching, but summarizing it as simple as possible, St. John warns against preachers who do not lead people to Christ’s Body, which is the Church present through Word and Sacrament. Many preachers nowadays are trying to cash in on the “spiritual but not religious” vibe that has been sweeping our cultural landscape since the 1960’s. They are teaching a Gospel of inner spiritual journey or inner enlightenment rather than a Gospel that brings people to the font, to the altar, and to the pulpit. The proof of this trend is not difficult to see. Churches remove the symbols of Christ’s Body (crucifixes, altars, pulpits, and fonts) and trade them for instruments (literally!) that encourage inner arousal masquerading as the movement of the Spirit. When preachers take people’s attention off of the “outside of me” Jesus found in the Word and Sacraments, and rather lead them into an “inside of me” Jesus conjured up by ecstasy-inducing means, the spirit is not just of false prophecy, but of the Antichrist himself, is at work.

These are the fruits by which we judge prophets. A good tree, one grounded and rooted in Jesus Christ and His Word, will produce good fruit, the words upon which the hearer will feed and be satisfied.

The images of the wolf in sheep’s clothing, the thornbush, and the thistle have this in common: on the surface they look benign or beautiful, but lurking beneath is something sharp and deadly. Thistles have a flower that might lure the unwary to reach down and pluck it, getting stuck in the process. What does this tell us of false prophets? On the surface, they look in every way like a true preacher. They say the right words (“Lord, Lord”). They do the right things (prophecy in His name, cast out demons, do miracles). But they do not do the will of God. What is the will of God? Law and Gospel, to preach the Law in its fullness and the Gospel in its fullness. The will of God is that the hearer believes in His Son, and only the preaching of the Law and Gospel will effect this. The true preacher will be grounded and rooted not just in the surface images of Jesus Christ, but in His Word.

Many preachers in today’s age preach a Jesus who is only a hazy reflection of the Christ revealed in the Gospels. Such might be a social justice Jesus (who supposedly came to liberate the poor) or a therapy Jesus (who supposedly came to heal our emotional hurts and pains). Politicians quote Jesus’ words for their own expediency. Parts of Jesus can be twisted for whatever reason the preacher has determined for the purpose of fulfilling his covetous desires. (Incidentally, one of the advantages of the historic lectionary – and the three-year lectionary to a lesser extent – is that it gives a portrayal of Jesus that by definition cannot be manipulated by any one preacher. It draws from all Gospels, was developed over two millennia, and spans the globe. When a preacher detaches from this lectionary, the message begins to conform to his own personal agenda rather than to the Church’s historic confession. Thus, the lectionary is a safeguard against false prophecy.)

that appear to give favor to one, in fact, He always satisfies and still gives leftovers, which end up being equally blessed for all.

Answer Key:

Fill in the blank on pages 33-34:

1. *c, h.*
2. *f, b, c, a, c.*
3. *g, f, g, f.*
4. *g, f, g, f.*
5. *g, f, l.*
6. *f.*

True/False (page 34): (1) *False*; (2) *False*; (3) *False*; (4) *True*.

Fill in the blanks (page 34):

1. *True Prophet* Jesus is God.
False Prophet Jesus is only a very great man.
2. *True Prophet* Jesus died for all your sins.
False Prophet Jesus died to help you save yourself.
3. *False Prophet* Baptism is only for adults.
True Prophet Baptism is for all people.

Activity: True and False Prophets (page 36):

False Prophets:

He loves money and power

He preaches bad teaching

He does not teach about Jesus and the cross

True Prophets:

He corrects bad teaching

He is able to teach the Gospel

He does not get into fights

He does not love money

Suggestions

1. Introduce the class by emphasizing that not everyone who is a pastor is always a good pastor. Invite a discussion on what might be a bad pastor. Make sure they know that a pastor is not bad just because he's not "fun"! Rather, lead them to see that a bad pastor is one who does not preach the Word of God and the Gospel.
2. Set up the Gospel by explaining what a thistle is. There is a picture of a thistle on the first page of this lesson. A thistle has a beautiful flower, but it is full of thorns and produces no fruit. A false prophet is similar. They look glorious and beautiful, but they feed us nothing. The same is true of wolves in sheep's clothing. Give some examples of people who might appear kind and nice, but they have other motives. What the children are learning regarding pastors and ministers is also true in general. They need to begin to learn discernment skills.
3. Ask why it is so important for Jesus to teach us what a true prophet is. It is because Jesus wants us to eat good fruit, not thorns. What does this tell us about Jesus? He loves us, wants to protect us, and He wants us to be nourished properly.
4. The pastor might come in to explain some of the teachings for the day. He might demonstrate some of the qualifications for being a pastor. He might ask things like, "Is it more important for me to tell you funny stories, or to tell you about Jesus?" Or, "Is it better for me to baptize you or to give you a piggy back ride." [Not, of course, that these other things are bad. The children would learn simply what the essential tasks of a minister are.] He might explain the schooling he went through to be "apt to teach."
5. To emphasize what true teaching is, take the images from the activities book of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Copy them and tape them to the wall or chalkboard. Copy out the quartered sheet of pictures that has depicted on them the elements of the Apostle's Creed. (The pictures are given roughly in the order of the Apostle's Creed; the first three pictures depict the Father's creative acts.) Copy them on cardstock paper if possible. Go through the Apostle's Creed slowly, and as it is spoken, have the children find the card that shows that part of the Creed and tape it below the correct Person of the Trinity. Or, play a game. Deal out the cards to the children, and go over the Creed. As a part of the Creed comes up, the child who has that card must go up and place it under the correct Person of the Trinity. As you teach what true teaching is, emphasize that if anyone does not teach these things, that is false teaching. For example, as you go over "conceived by the Holy Spirit," say, "Some people say that Jesus is not God."

+ + +

The Parable of the Shrewd Steward

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Week: The 9th Sunday after Trinity Story: The Parable of the Shrewd Steward Text: Luke 16: 1-9</p> | <p>Theme: Jesus teaches us to make friends with debtors.</p> |
|---|---|

Commentary

Today's parable is one of the most difficult texts in Scripture. On face level, the point seems to be quite profane: *use money to make friends, because they'll help you get into heaven*. Not only does the point seem profane, but it shatters every notion we have about other Christian teachings. Can we buy our way into heaven? If Jesus is judging us, why would anyone else welcome us into heaven?

The way to approach the parable is first to lay out who's who in the parable. Parables are stories that teach about the kingdom of heaven, and the characters in the parable will teach about characters in the kingdom. On these terms,

there are basically three characters: the rich man, the steward, and the debtors. If other parables serve as a guide, the rich man is God. Also in the parables, stewards often represent ministers, or the apostles (cf. I Corinthians 4: 1-2); but in this context, it may also refer to all Christians and the stewardship they have been given by the grace of God. The debtors represent any and all who have a debt to God. We know that debt to be sin, but in the context of the Gospel of Luke and especially this parable, we can expand the meaning of debtors to include those secondary effects of the debt of sin such as poverty, disease, lameness, and death. As we will see, Jesus makes a showing in this parable (as He does in all parables) through each of the characters.

Having settled upon the characters, we can use Jesus' concluding words as the key to the text. He says, "Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home." Leaving out the bit about "unrighteous mammon" for the moment and simply focusing on the simple conclusion that Jesus makes, He says: *Make friends with debtors*. Focusing on this phrase begins to reveal the pearl in the parable, because this is exactly what Jesus did with the stewardship that He had been given. He went around doing good, healing those who were in bondage to sin, death, and the devil. He released people from their debt of sin. And He teaches the stewards He will send out, the apostles, to do the same. They are to perform a ministry of forgiveness and mercy toward those who are indebted to God. And all Christians are given a stewardship toward their neighbors as well, to show mercy to them that need it, that is, to debtors.

But how is it that our acts of mercy to debtors will lead those same debtors to welcome us on Judgment Day? Is not Jesus the Judge? Yes, but there are several Scriptures that teach that when we give to the poor, we give to the Lord. Proverbs 19: 17 sheds much light on this Gospel when it says, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given." Matthew 25 as well reveals the parable about Judgment Day, on which Jesus will say, "Whatever you did to the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me." Jesus, of course, was in ultimate poverty, nakedness, hunger, and thirst on the cross. And because He was made to be sin on the cross, He carried a huge debt of sin. His debt was forgiven when He died and all our sins were buried with Him. We take part in this "debt-forgiveness" when we join Him in His crucifixion through baptism, and our lives then become marked by a ministry of debt-forgiveness for others. The call of this parable would then fall under the "daily baptism" that we undergo, each day dying to our old unmerciful sins and rising to a new life of mercy and forgiveness for others.

The above explanation gives possible meaning to the basic elements of the parable, that is, the characters and the meaning. Simply speaking, as stewards of the grace of God, we are to strive to be like the Chief Steward, Jesus, and be about the task of relieving debtors of their debt, because when we do so, we are in truth relieving the debt of the One Who will judge us and welcome us into heaven, Jesus Christ. But this leaves us with a confusion. Will we be welcomed into heaven because we have helped debtors, because we have given to the poor, and because we have forgiven others? Isn't it by faith that we are granted admission into heaven?

Yes, but faith always necessarily produces fruits, and among these fruits is forgiveness for others, mercy for debtors, care for the poor, etc. The "problem" with this doctrine – that faith will necessarily produce fruits – is that it is difficult to break down for us psychologically. How come, for example, I don't feel like running out to a soup kitchen after I leave Holy Communion? Why do I still feel anger in my heart toward my spouse after hearing the Gospel of forgiveness? If I dwell on such thoughts, I could come to the conclusion that there is not something entirely productive going on with the Gospel in my life, that I must make something happen on my own, else I will not see the evidence of my faith. I might conclude that I really don't have faith in the first place. And so, I might guilt myself into going to the soup kitchen, or act out the deed of forgiving my spouse by buying her roses. Then, at the end of the day, I might conclude, "Good, I've done what I was supposed to do by the Gospel." We might even say within ourselves, "How shrewd of me." And then again we might get a twinge of piety and think, "But are my motives correct?!" And then we go back and forth.

Perhaps Jesus (and this is a big "perhaps") is saying, "Good. Fine. I don't care how you've done what you're supposed to be doing. I don't care about the psychological process you went through – how shrewdly you mapped out your spiritual growth – when you ended up doing good for others. The point is that the Gospel was preached to you, and you did good. The beginning was the Gospel, and it ended with your act of mercy toward another. How you got from point A to B may have been utterly stained by 'unrighteous Mammon,' that is, by all this shrewd behavior, but in the end, you did what you were supposed to do, and I in my ultimate wisdom know that it was the Gospel which truly produced that fruit by the Holy Spirit." In essence, then, perhaps Jesus was meaning what Martin Luther was meaning when he said, "Sin boldly." That is, don't get caught up in all sorts of psychological introspection when it comes to the acting out of faith. Just do what must be done, and let the Holy Spirit work out the finer details. In the meantime, we trust the truths that we can know based on the Word of God, that the Gospel will produce fruit when preached, that we are saved by our faith, and that our good works will be shown to be manifest on Judgment Day. The psychological mechanisms that surrounded those truths in our minds may be shrewd, or may be not, but that's irrelevant. The Holy Spirit will work what He will work, even through our own "unrighteous Mammon" shrewdness.

That last point brings us back into the parable. The steward, it must be kept in mind, was the face, hands, and voice of the rich man. The steward represented the rich man in all his financial dealings. Thus, if the steward forgave debts, the rich man was forgiving debts. The rich man was bound by the steward's actions. The debtor had no idea of the inner psychological musings of the steward (or as it says in the Gospel, what the steward "said within himself"). From his perspective, the rich man had had mercy on him through the steward. The rich man looked good and merciful to the

debtors, and they would have cheered him. The psychological musings of the steward now become unimportant to all concerned.

Likewise, the one who is a target of our mercy has no idea how we got to that point of giving mercy – whether its motives were shrewd or pure. All he knows is that he has been dealt with mercifully. And from God’s perspective, and from the perspective of our confession of faith, and from the perspective of those who need mercy, the ultimate truth is that that deed of mercy was worked by the Holy Spirit by the Gospel. God comes out the good and merciful one.

Our Lutheran confessions teach that every good deed will be “impure and incomplete.” Still, they are “pleasing and acceptable to God...for the sake of the Lord Christ.” The shrewd steward’s goodness toward debtors was certainly from “impure and incomplete” motives. Yet, it was commended by the rich man. Why? Because in a way, the steward had faith that his show of goodness would not be undone by the rich man, meaning, he had faith in the rich man’s goodness.

Answer Key

Labeling on page 39:

Which one is God? *The rich man behind the steward.*

Which one is Jesus? *The steward in front of the steward.*

Which one is us? *The poor debtor.*

What is Jesus doing? *Forgiving the poor debtor his debt.*

Middle of page 39: *The underlined word is “friend.”*

Bottom of page 39: *The missing word is “blood.”*

Suggestions:

1. Today’s Gospel is difficult to understand, so teach it in bite-sized pieces. First teach who the rich man is (God). Then teach who the stewards are (ministers in one sense; all Christians in another sense; ministers are stewards of the Word and Sacraments; all Christians are stewards of the grace given them through Word and Sacrament). Then teach about debtors, that debtors are those who have a debt of sin to God. Then teach how Jesus was the steward who cut our debt, even erasing it completely. Teach about how when we lend to the poor, we lend to the Lord. Putting all these pieces together may be beyond the children’s understanding, but the individual pieces should be easy enough to understand.
2. Show how Jesus is present in the parable through all three characters. He is the rich man, whose stewards are the apostles, ministers, and each Christian. Jesus is the steward, Who erased the debts of many debtors. He is also the poor debtors, upon Whom was the debt of the sin of the world, and Whom we truly feed when we feed the poor.
3. Review what Mammon is. Mammon is the money god, and Mammon is money and possessions.
4. Have the children color the picture of the poor man with God’s hand behind him. This teaches the Scriptural teaching that when one lends to the poor, he lends to God. This is the only way to explain how a man using “unrighteous Mammon” to help poor debtors will be repaid on Judgment Day. We will not be judged by debtors, but by God. Yet, when we lend to debtors, we lend to God. More is going on with today’s parable, but at this level, the children will not understand it. Jesus says, “Make friends with debtors.” Be sure, before they begin coloring, to point out that we are the poor man in that picture, and Jesus made friends with us sinners. In turn, when we give to the poor, we give to Jesus. (Yes, it is a mystery! But these are some of the realities of the Gospel derived from the Incarnation of God in human flesh.)

+ + +

The Lord’s Visitation

Week: The 10th Sunday after Trinity

Story: The Lord’s Visitation

Text: Luke 19: 41-48

Theme: Jesus prophesies about the future of Jerusalem before visiting and cleansing the temple.

Commentary

The word for *visitation* in this Gospel, in the Greek, is *episkope*. This word, which serves as the basis of the word “episcopal,” has the same root word as that which is translated “bishop” or “overseer.” The idea is of a man charged with the responsibility of oversight, like a bishop coming in to check up on a local congregation. This was exactly what Jesus was doing in His visit to Jerusalem. Specifically, He was fulfilling a prophecy from the Old Testament, from Zechariah 10: 3, “My anger is kindled against the shepherds, And I will punish the goatherds. For the LORD of hosts will visit His flock, The house of Judah, And will make them as His royal horse in the battle.”

Yes, the Lord is visiting His house, which is exactly what Jesus does as soon as He enters Jerusalem. He turns over the money-changers and then proceeds to do what is the proper function of the temple: He teaches.

Before bringing His judgment upon the current shepherds of the temple and doing what ought to be done, He first weeps over Jerusalem. This is one of two times that Jesus weeps in Scripture, the other time being at the death of Lazarus. Jesus weeps because He foresees the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. He knew the slaughter that would come upon His people, all because they did not know the things that made for their peace.

To understand Jesus' meaning here, we have to understand why the Romans came and dismantled Jerusalem in AD 70. Tensions had been mounting in Israel ever since the days that the Romans conquered them, and various factions were interpreting God's promises about an everlasting kingdom politically. That is, they believed that God's promise to King David – that his kingdom would never end – would be fulfilled on earth, in a political fashion. The disciples were under this delusion even up to the point of Jesus' ascension (cf. Acts 1: 6). Judas also was hoping that Jesus would be a political Messiah, and many think that this was his major reason for betraying Jesus; Jesus did not fulfill his expectations of what he wanted out of a Messiah. Jesus teaches quite clearly that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18: 36) and that the kingdom of God is within (or among) us (Luke 17: 21). Christ also clearly differentiates between God and Caesar, granting that Caesar has a sphere of power that Jesus has no plans of supplanting (see also Romans 13).

What, then, were the things that made for Israel's peace? To answer this question, we have to understand what had brought upon Israel their tyranny and warfare. Quite clearly, their oppression by the Roman Empire and all other empires was the result of their sin and faithlessness. Leviticus 26 lays down the program of events that will happen if Israel fails in her faithfulness to the Lord. As verse 33 says, "I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste." Indeed, that is exactly what happened to Israel, it's major city lay desolate. What, then, made for her peace? The Lord answer this question in Leviticus 26: 40: "If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me," then He will forgive them. In other words, repentance and forgiveness of sins was the thing that made for her peace.

Of course, that is precisely why Jesus came into Jerusalem, to bear the sins of His people. He wept because He knew that a great majority of the Jewish people would not recognize Him as the source of their forgiveness and peace. After Jesus arose, He came to His disciples and gave them peace, and then He proceeded to breathe out His Holy Spirit upon them, and with that Spirit, the ministry of the forgiveness of sins. This was what made for their peace. But with the Lord, there is always a remnant, and so we see that there were indeed some Jews who were "attentive" to hear Jesus.

Answer Key:

Fill in the blank on page 41:

1. *wept*
2. *peace*
3. *surround*
4. *level*
5. *stone*
6. *temple*
7. *drive out*
8. *prayer*
9. *teaching*

Multiple Choice on page 42:

1. X Jesus is a King, but His kingdom is not of this world.
Jesus is a King who rules a kingdom on this earth.
2. Jesus rules over us, and we are His subjects.
X Jesus rules over sin, death, and the devil for us; we rule with Him.
3. Jesus conquers with armies and weapons.
X Jesus conquers by dying on the cross and rising again.

Writing out the passages on page 43:

- John 20: 21: "*Peace to you.*"
- John 20: 23. "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*"

The situations of Glenn and Henrietta (page 43):

- *Glenn needs to be told that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.*
- *Henrietta has the better understanding of Jesus.*

Activity (page 44): *The word spells out "attentive."*

Suggestions

1. The teacher might be prepared to give more details about the Roman sack of Jerusalem in AD 70. It is a remarkably dramatic story to which the children may pay apt attention. Information on the Roman siege and sack of Jerusalem may be found easily on the internet, or the pastor should have resources.
2. Make sure the children understand that Jesus is only days away from being crucified. In fact, His actions in the temple were a major reason for His crucifixion.

3. Spend some time on the phrase, "house of prayer." Encourage the children to say a prayer when they come to church and sit down in the pew. Perhaps teach them how to pray. Teach them to pray a Psalm from the hymnal before the service.
4. Teach about greed and how Jesus was angry with it. People were buying and selling things in the temple as if it were a marketplace. Ask the children if the church should be like a mall.
5. Have the children color the map of the Roman Empire to familiarize themselves with the geography of Jesus' day. Guide them to color the water blue and the provinces various shades of other colors. Point out where Israel is. Point out how small it was compared to the Roman Empire.
6. Print out the prayer sheet from the activities folder on both sides so that it can be made in booklet form. The children may simply take them to help them in their prayer, or they can decorate it with a cover of construction paper or felt..

+ + +

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Week: The 11th Sunday after Trinity Story: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector Text: Luke 18: 9-14</p> | <p>Theme: Jesus teaches about humility and true justification against false piety.</p> |
|---|---|

Commentary

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector teaches a simple lesson, and does so in stark categories that make it difficult to miss the point. The basic point, of course, is that by which Jesus concludes the Gospel, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus tells the parable specifically for two reasons. First, because some "trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Second, because they "despised others." The two go hand in hand. In the Large Catechism in his explanation of the first commandment, Luther nicely describes that one of the most powerful forms of idolatry is the idolizing of our own righteousness. Idolizing one's own righteousness is exactly what those who "trust in themselves" do. They do not trust in God, but they trust in themselves, however that bears itself out. Further, if they trust in themselves, it naturally follows that they would despise others. For what other reason to we despise others, than that we look at our own abilities and we say, "If I can do it, why can't they?!"

But a point might be passed over by the careless reader regarding the prayer of the Pharisee. His prayer is not denying the Lord His due honor. The Pharisee is not saying, "I can do it on my own." Rather, he confesses that it is by God's power that he has done all his wonderful acts of piety. His first words are "I thank you." He would not thank the Lord first and foremost if he did not have a theology which ultimately looked to the Lord as the source of his good deeds. But this is where the chicanery of the devil's temptation is made manifest, that a man can still be trusting in himself even when he is directing glory to God.

And this is precisely the major pitfall of so much sanctification theology that is still present today. Some theologies look at grace as a "spiritual steroid," a shot in the arm that helps the Christian to be a better person. Lurking along with this theology are those oft-used sanctification words, *empower* and *enable*. Of course, such people would never deny that God was the source of all their good deeds, nevertheless, they will be quick to tell others all the wonderful things they have done. They may be very good at masking their sin of pride behind pious talk. "By God's grace, I did this and that," they will say, or, "God empowered me to do such and so," which amounts to little more than what the Pharisee said. Ultimately, such theology (which we all have bred in us) is really nothing less than a masquerade for self righteousness.

The true righteousness, that of the tax collector, is the result of no room being allowed for any sort of "I did it myself." No, the tax collector could scarcely lift his eyes, so lacking in confidence was he in his own righteousness. He was at the "zero point," the point at which he had to rely completely on the Lord's mercy and nothing else, certainly not on anything he had done, or on anything that he could sneakily claim that God had enabled or empowered him to do. Someone with the faith of the tax collector would never be caught recounting any of his supposed good deeds in the first place! Rather, as Jesus teaches, when we do good, we ought simply to say that "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do." (Luke 17: 10) As the sheep respond to Jesus on Judgement Day, "When did we see you hungry and feed you?" (Matthew 25: 37)

So the tax collector went home justified, a point which marshals strong evidence for the Lutheran understanding of the doctrine of justification. That is, justification is not something that God grants to us after a life of working righteousness in us by the Holy Spirit, rather, justification is something given to the one who comes to God offering nothing but his broken spirit. The tax collector, in lieu of his forgiveness, would bear fruits of this forgiveness in the days that followed (as Zacchaeus did), but the Gospel clearly says that the tax collector went home justified.

Still, justification is not simply a cosmic declaration on the part of God that we are forgiven, but it is derived from Jesus' death on the cross. We are justified by His blood, at the cross, where God made Jesus to be our sin, and we to

be His righteousness (II Corinthians 5: 21). If we are exalted after having been humbled, it is because we are exalted with Christ. As St. Paul teaches, in Christ's resurrection we are exalted and justified (Romans 4: 25).

Answer Key:

Short answer on page 45:

1. Why did Jesus tell this parable? *Because some trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*
2. What did the Pharisee pray? *"God, I thank You that I am not like other men."*
3. What did the tax collector pray? *God, be merciful to me a sinner!*
4. Which one went home justified? *The tax collector.*

Fill in the blanks (bottom of page 45):

- Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles will be exalted.

Questions on page 46:

- Should we brag about how good we are? *No.*
- Will we get to heaven because we are so good? *No.*
- Why do we get to heaven? *Because of God's mercy.*

Matching on page 47: (1) g; (2) d; (3) b; (4) c; (5) a; (6) e; (7) f.

Word Search (page 48):

1. *Justified*
2. *Parable*
3. *Washing*
4. *Jesus*
5. *Merciful*
6. *Humbled*
7. *Exalted*
8. *Gift*
9. *Works*
10. *Despised*

Suggestions:

1. Lead the children through those parts of the liturgy where we call upon the Lord in mercy. There are three main locations where we pray for mercy, in the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the *Agnus Dei*.
2. Mention how the Pharisee actually thanked God for all his pious deeds. Just because someone is doing something pious does not mean they are being humble.
3. The students should correctly fill out the quote bubbles in the image of the Pharisee and tax collector in the activities folder. They may then color the image.

+ + +

Ephphatha

Week: The 12th Sunday after Trinity

Story: Ephphatha

Text: Mark 7: 31-37

Theme: Jesus opens the ears of a deaf man and loosens his tongue.

Commentary

Today's Gospel is a beautiful primer on how faith happens, and as such, is a hugely baptismal text. If one theme has come up again and again in these early Trinity season Gospels, it is the divine monergism mentioned several lessons ago. Divine monergism is the teaching that our salvation is completely God's work. As we learned last week, there is nothing we can claim or boast in, even as if by God's grace! That is, we cannot play games, saying, "I came to faith by God's grace." No, if it is truly all God's work, there is no "I" at all, but only "me," as in "God saved me completely." We are never the subjects of any aspect of our salvation, but only the object. If, perchance, we have done something good, it is not us, but Christ in us. But our personal confession only remains, "Nothing good remains in me, that is, in my flesh" (Romans 7: 18).

Without Christ, we are deaf and dumb, like the man in the Gospel. By way of background, this man was probably a gentile, as the region of the Decapolis from which he came was gentile. This detail merely reaffirms Christ's universal mission. He came for Jews and gentiles.

By way of other background, there are two other details in today's Gospel which curiously play a part in the Gospel of Mark. The first is that Jesus was healing a deaf person. Interestingly, Mark is the only Gospel to recount stories (two of them) about Jesus healing deaf people. Matthew and Luke mention generally that Jesus came to heal the deaf, but only Mark relates actual episodes of Jesus doing so. Also, Mark's is the only Gospel which mentions the sighing that Jesus did. Luke and John mention Jesus' tears, but Mark at two points refers to Jesus' deep sighs, once here and once in response to the faithlessness of the Pharisees (Mark 8: 12).

Being deaf and dumb are seen in other places as a direct result of demonic bondage (Mark 9: 25), and it is precisely this demonic bondage under which every person is born. All are born deaf and dumb, deaf to God's Word and dumb to confess His name. And it is only by God's finger that demons may be put to flight, as we find out in Luke 11: 20, "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." If it is only by God's finger that the bondage of the demons is broken, then no wonder that Jesus stuck His Divine Fingers into the ears of this deaf man, putting his demons to flight and allowing him to hear the Word. Likewise with the tongue, which Jesus touched.

Jesus' spitting recalls a rite in the early church, in which candidates for baptism would face the west and spit toward the devil as a sign of their renunciation of him. Why the west? Because Jesus says He is returning from the east. If Jesus is from the east, the devil must be from the west. The Greek word for spit in the Gospel, *ptusas*, even sounds like what it is, sort of like our "phooey." Jesus was doing a "phooey on you" toward the devil when He spat.

The sighing of Jesus recalls the words of Hebrews 5: 7-8: "[Jesus], in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." Jesus immersed Himself in our tears and sighs, talking upon Himself the groaning that the whole creation does in anticipation of its redemption (see Romans 8 for an excellent review of this teaching). Indeed, we are all, this side of heaven, in a state of sighing, and Jesus demonstrates His full humanity by offering up His own sighs. Still, we know that God answers such sighs, and in fact is in them (Romans 8: 26-27). Yes, through Christ's sighs, our own sighs become sanctified, wherein we know that God is with us. Of course, we learn this already in the Old Testament, from Psalm 38: 9, "Lord, all my desire is before You; And my sighing is not hidden from You."

The word of "ephphatha," an Aramaic word (perhaps a nod to the man's provenance), was Christ's Word of release for the man's ears and mouth, by which he was then able to hear Christ's Word and confess him. This word has also made it into the baptismal liturgy of some churches. That is, the baptismal rite is seen as exactly what Jesus did in the Gospel, the sacrament at which the Holy Spirit loosens a man's tongue to confess the Lord (through the baptismal, Apostles' Creed) and opens his ears to hear the Word of the Gospel.

Once again, the divine monergism is not difficult to discern. We do not come to faith by our own free will, when we decide to follow Jesus, or choose to surrender to Him, or give our hearts over to Him. By nature, do not receive the things of the spirit, but they are foolishness to us (I Corinthians 2: 14). It is only by a special working of the Holy Spirit, through the preached Word, that we are able to hear and confess Jesus as Lord and Christ (Romans 10: 14, 17; I Corinthians 12: 3).

Answer Key:

Fill in the blank on page 50:

Jesus' finger is the finger of God

The finger of God casts out the devil.

Why did Jesus stick His fingers in the man's ears and touch his tongue? *To cast out the devils that bound it.*

Questions on page 50:

Read Psalm 31: 10. What do we sigh about? *Our sins.*

Read Psalm 12: 5 & Psalm 38: 9. What will the Lord do for us in our sighing? *He will save us from it.*

Matching on page 51: *b, d, c, a.*

True and False (page 51):

1. *True*
2. *True*
3. *False (He stuck His fingers in the man's ears to chase away the demons.)*
4. *False (Jesus is fully human too.)*
5. *False (The Lord is not hidden from our sighs.)*
6. *True*
7. *False (Be opened.)*

Activity (page 51):

1. *Decapolis*
2. *Ephphatha*
3. *The Holy Spirit*

Suggestions:

1. Do not be afraid to make the strong connections between this Gospel and Holy Baptism. The Church has used rites

- and liturgies that employ the elements of this Gospel. Baptism chases demons away, opens our ears to hear the Word, and loosens our tongues to confess Him. All this is by the Holy Spirit. The kids will like the idea that Jesus spat in the face of the devil. Emphasize the Greek word for spitting, “ptuo.”
2. Review the Small Catechism, Article 3 of the Creed, and slowly go over the teachings of the Holy Spirit. Specifically, teach how we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus or come to Him. It is all the Holy Spirit’s work.
 3. Probe the nuances of this doctrine with the children. If it is only by the work of the Holy Spirit that we hear the Word, why should it be so hard to believe that babies can hear and believe when they are baptized? Can adults understand the Word any better than babies?

+ + +

The Good Samaritan

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Week: The 13th Sunday after Trinity Story: The Good Samaritan Text: Luke 10: 23: 37</p> | <p>Theme: The Law alone will not save the one who is dead in his sins. Jesus, our High Priest, comes near to us, helps us, and washes Himself at the cross, so that we might be healed. He provides for our continual help through the Sacraments of the Church.</p> |
|--|---|

Commentary

The key to understanding the Parable of the Good Samaritan is the context of the story. A lawyer comes up to test Jesus on the issue of eternal life. Jesus, never one to be trapped by the verbal tricks of His opponents, deals with this lawyer brilliantly. In the end, He also shows the lawyer a tremendous amount of mercy.

A lawyer in Jesus’ day was a student of the Law of God. Today, such a lawyer would be called a theologian, or a Bible scholar. Such people, in other words, are expected to know the Word of God inside and out. The problem, however, in this Gospel is a fundamental one: the lawyer did not see Jesus as the substance and fulfillment of the Law. He saw Jesus as an imposter, someone to be tricked or trapped. For this reason, the lawyer was doomed from the beginning.

The lawyer asks Jesus, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

The law student asks a law question, so Jesus gives him a law answer. “What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?”

Immediately with this question, Jesus turns the tables on the lawyer. Jesus is no longer in a defensive position, but in the position of Teacher, as is fitting.

The lawyer answers correctly, saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus, knowing what was on the heart of the lawyer, says, “Do this and you will live.”

The lawyer wanted to justify himself, so he asks, “But who is my neighbor?”

The lawyer wanted to put parameters on the Law of God. If there were parameters, he could all the more easily see how he fit within those parameters. If, say, love of neighbor only applied to Jews, he could hate Samaritans, while still claiming to have love for his neighbors. By this methodology, he could show himself righteous before God despite his sin.

We all play this game with God’s law. It is a disease that attaches itself deep within our hearts. We want to justify ourselves through the parameters that we ourselves set on God’s Law. If, say, we can set limits on “bearing false witness” so that it does not include gossip, we can freely gossip while still believing ourselves righteous. Only the remedy of Jesus can cure this disease.

In the parable, there are two laws which are pertinent. The lawyer would know both of these laws. The first law was the law mentioned above, that is, love for neighbor. The other law is one found in Leviticus 22: 4-7, and it has to do with the contact of priests and Levites with corpses. Basically, if a priest or Levite had any contact with a corpse, he was unclean until the evening came and he washed with water. This is actually the reason why the priest and Levite crossed to the other side. The man looked dead! In the minds of the priest and Levite, it was against the law to get near what they thought was a dead body.

Their understanding of the Law was safe, but something was missing. They ended up not showing “love for neighbor.” This law came in conflict with the first. Only the Samaritan showed love for his neighbor by taking the man to an inn and healing him with oil and wine.

There is a tension in this Gospel that seems unresolved. According to the Law, the priest and Levite were being careful observers of the Law. The Samaritan, however, was the one who most loved his neighbor, which was also part of the Law. How can this tension be resolved?

Only Jesus resolves the tension. Jesus too is a High Priest, and so Jesus was also bound by the Law. But Jesus

in His mercy and compassion, like the Good Samaritan, chose to come into contact with corpses in order to help them. He comes into contact with us in the deadness of our sin. According to the Law, He needed to wash Himself. He did precisely this at the cross, where His death was a baptism which washed away the sins of the world.

Here is where the love of God shatters all parameters. Where we see a parameter – “don’t touch corpses” – the Lord sees a way by which He can touch a corpse, while yet remaining faithful. He chose to become unclean so that we might be healed.

Likewise, if the priest (or Levite) had stopped to help the man, and then washed himself as the Law had commanded, his washing could have meant healing for the wounded man. But the priest and Levite could not even think in these terms because they did not see sacrificial love as the fulfillment of the Law. They, like the lawyer, had set up parameters that limited the full meaning of the Law.

Hopefully, the lawyer learned that his understanding of the Law left a man to die. Perhaps after Jesus died and rose again, and the Church was established in Christ’s love, the lawyer saw that Jesus alone truly fulfilled what the Law was about. Perhaps when the lawyer was sick, or dying, he looked back to Jesus’ words and took comfort that Jesus was the High Priest who helped the “half dead.” Perhaps he realized that Jesus is the true Good Samaritan.

Answer Key

The parts of the story in order (page 53): *First line: 5, 3, 8, 2; second line: 7, 1, 4, 6.*

The two laws that the students will write down from the teacher (page 54):

- 1.) *Leviticus 22: 4, 6 – “Whatever man of the descendants of Aaron [This would be a Levite], who is a leper or has a discharge, shall not eat the holy offerings until he is clean. And whoever touches anything made unclean by a corpse...the person who has touched any such thing shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat the holy offerings unless he washes his body with water.”*

Leviticus 21: 10-11 – “He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; nor shall he go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother.”

These two laws may be rephrased as: “A Levite or a high priest shall not go near a dead body, or he will be unclean, unless he washes.”

- 2.) *Leviticus 19: 18 – You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

Now answer the following questions based on the parable (pages 54-55):

- Which law did the priest and the Levite think they were keeping? Why did they think they were keeping this law? Because the man looked “half dead.” *The first one. They did not want to become unclean by coming near it.*
- Which law did the Samaritan keep? *The second one.*
- Which law would the lawyer want to be kept if he were robbed and beaten? *The second one!*
- Who was a neighbor to the one who had fallen? *The Samaritan, the one who loved him as he would want to be loved himself.*
- Which laws did Jesus keep? *Both laws! He loved His neighbors, but when He became unclean by contact with people who were unclean, he washed Himself in His baptism at the cross. [This is where He took our uncleanness and died for us.]*

Discuss the following questions (page 55):

- Of the two laws, which ones does God want to be kept? *Both laws.*
- Did Jesus keep both laws? *Yes.*
- If we are dead in our sins, should any priest come near to us? *Not according to one law, but according to the greater meaning of the Law.*
- The Bible says that Jesus is our Priest. Does He come near to us? *Yes. He touches us and heals us.*
- What, then, does the Law command that Jesus do? *Wash Himself.*
- Where did Jesus become cleansed of all our sins? *At the cross. This was His baptism.*
- Where do we get all our sins washed away? *At Holy Baptism.*

Activity: Matching (page 56)

- The man is robbed and left for half dead ---->We are dead in our sins.
- The priest and Levite keep the Law and stay far from the man ---->Obeying the Law will not help us.
- The Samaritan has compassion ---->Jesus Alone sees us and has mercy on us.
- The Samaritan uses oil and wine to heal the man ---->Jesus heals us with the Sacraments.
- The Samaritan pays the innkeeper to care for the man ---->Jesus sets up the Church to care for us.

Suggestions

1. Be sure to explain that the priest and the Levite were not crossing the road because they were mean people. They crossed the road because they believed they were obeying the Law. The lawyer was being shown that the way he understood the law ended up hurting people, and God does not want people to be hurt by His law.
2. The children should know the answer to the question, “Who is our neighbor?” Our neighbor is “Anyone who has need of us.” This question might be asked several times throughout the class, so that the children know the

answer.

3. Remind the children that their neighbors include their parents, brothers, sisters, and friends.
4. Emphasize that Jesus is the true Good Samaritan. He became unclean so that we might be healed. This theme runs through several of the Gospels in this quarter, so it is important for the children to know this important teaching: Jesus touches and comes in contact with those who are unclean, so that He might love them and help them.
5. To understand the teaching ploy that Jesus was using with the lawyer, think of some examples where a child's rule might end up hurting the child who made that rule. For example, if a child in a temper tantrum says, "No one can cross this line and come into my room." This might hurt him later, if, say, he falls down and hurts himself, and cannot get up. Or, if a child were to make the rule, "I'm going to punch anyone who touches my football," and then his baby sister touches it, would he really want to punch his baby sister? This is what the lawyers were doing with God's Law in Jesus' day. They were making it become a thing that didn't lead to God's mercy in Jesus Christ, but ended up hurting people.