

## Trinity 17 (2024)

Apparently, Jesus' mamma did teach Him what many mothers teach their children today . . . that there are some subjects that are better avoided in social situations, politics and religion being two of them.

Or, if she did, He chose to disregard this instruction on the occasion highlighted in this morning's reading.

To put the passage in context, Jesus was at dinner at the home of a leading Pharisee on the Sabbath. But before I move to the main body of the story, I want to make a preliminary observation and application.

Jesus went out to where people were. He mingled with all sorts, including tax-gather and others that the strict Jews would have considered beyond the pale. But, as we see in this passage, He also associated with

‘respectable’ people, included the Pharisees, who were some of his severest critics.

Yet, one thing remained constant: He was always about His Father’s business.

There is something we can learn from Jesus’ here. We too need to go out where people are and to always be about the Father’s business.

YOU are the face of Christ in your community. You are the only Bible many people will read.

I knew a man in Toronto, Canada, a Christian leader by the name of Joe Boot, who took this responsibility very seriously.

In order to get to know people outside his church circle, he joined a basketball team. Some of his teammates were the fathers of the children with whom his children went to school.

Lest you think he showed up the first day of practice with a stack of Gospel tracts, he did not. He was wiser than that.

Rather, he got to know his teammates. He listened to their problems and shared his. He became their friend. But all the time, his goal was to be the face of Christ. As opportunities arose, he was able to share the Gospel.

There is something to be said for his approach. Some will never step inside the doors of a church. We must go to where they are.

A children's hymn says:

*Untold millions are still untold;  
Untold millions are still outside the fold  
Who will tell them of Jesus' love?*

That question gets answered a line or so down:

*Now he calls to you and to me  
To go and bring them in.*

The key word is ‘go’. Go to where the people are. Be the Gospel.

Of course, there are some venues Christians should not go. If, for example, you think you might be tempted to do something you ought not or if your presence would compromise your Christian witness, you should probably stay away. As in all things, good judgment and common sense are needed.

Let’s return now to the main body of the story. As I noted in the beginning Jesus did not observe the ‘rule’ of not talking politics and religion at the dinner table. In particular, He was guilty of the latter – talking religion.

On the occasion spoken of in today’s Gospel He goes so far as to deliver what might be called a dinnertime sermon.

The overarching theme of this ‘sermon’ was “Getting religion right”. Many sermons have three points. This one had two. He highlighted the importance of **mercy** and **humility**.

His first point which concerned mercy was occasioned by a man with the dropsy present at dinner that day.

Dropsy is a condition where an abnormal amount of fluid builds up in the tissues of the body. It is, therefore, very observable. You would be hard pressed to have a Dropsy Anonymous support group.

It might well have been that the host or one of his Pharisee buddies had planted this man at the table in order to discredit Jesus . . . to see if He would heal on the Sabbath.

If that indeed was the case, they did not care whether this man was healed or not. They were indifferent to his pain. They were merciless.

The Sabbath was a gracious provision on God's part, but by this time its observance had become very legalistic. A whole set of man-made rules had been added.

That reminds me of a story. I once heard a friend of my mother tell how that at her Presbyterian college soft drink machines were jammed on Sundays so there would be no trading on the Lord's Day. That is legalism.

Be that as it may, those present at the dinner at the Pharisee's house were *watching* Jesus. Likely they were up to no good.

One older commentator says: **“They watched as intently as a dog doth for a bone.”** What were they looking for?

Well, I have already told you. If Jesus healed on the Sabbath, they could accuse him of breaking God's commandment to do no work on the day set aside for rest.

Jesus, as I hope you noticed, dealt with the situation brilliantly. Before healing the man, He put before them a question: **Is lawful to do good on the Sabbath?**

In so asking, He boxed them into a corner. If they said yes, they themselves might well have been accused of disregarding the command to keep the Sabbath holy.

If they said no, their hypocrisy would have been exposed. They would have been shown to be callous and unfeeling towards a fellow human being.

So, what did they do? /// They kept their mouths closed . . . leaving Jesus open to heal the man with the dropsy.

After He had done so, He asked them another question: **If you have an animal that gets in trouble on the sabbath, would you not do what you could do to relieve his suffering?**

Of course, they would have. That was His point. **How much more should mercy be extended to one created in God's image.**

His logic was impeccable. Again, they could say nothing.

Jesus' point still holds.

I remember one Sunday morning receiving a call from a woman whose husband had had to be rushed to hospital after he had fallen. She was there with him in the emergency room.

Knowing she needed support, I called a layman in the church and said: **"Mike, I don't want you to go to church this morning."**

There was silence on the line. **"Yes, you heard me right. I don't want you to go to church. Instead, I want you to go to the Emergency Room and sit with . . . I gave her**



**name. Her husband has fallen, and she is all alone.”**

He understood and went. In Hebrews, we are commanded not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Yet, mercy at times trumps Sunday observance.

**“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful,”** says Jesus in Luke 6:36. That command is part of the royal law to love our neighbor. No command is more important.

Again, common sense and right judgment is called for. At times, the Pharisees seem to have been lacking in both. But we can do better. After all, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us. When in doubt, go for mercy every time.

We move now to Jesus’ second point concerning **humility**.

What brought about this point was that as those present at the table were watching Jesus, He was watching them.

What He saw were people jockeying for position and status, people playing at religion and getting it wrong.

Fast forward to another meal scene . . . to the last Supper.

On this occasion there were no servants present to wash feet, a necessary task in days when people wore sandals and walked on dusty roads. In response, Jesus takes a bason and towel and goes around the table and does what the disciples were too proud to do.

When He was finished, he asks them: **Do you know what I have done? /// I have given you an example.**

In so saying, He was enjoining on His followers the very quality the Jewish religious leaders at the first dinner lacked – humility.

Jesus' instruction to the disciples still needs to be heard in the Church today.

By humility, I don't mean some put-on act, a show, but paying attention to the needs of others . . . being a band of servants.

Are we doing this at St. Luke's? I think for the most part we are. There is a lot of love in this place. Let's strive to keep it that way.

In closing, the over-arching theme of Jesus' 'sermon' that day was getting religion right. It is possible to get it wrong. Religion, as some of you know from personal experience, can become a very toxic thing.

How do we get it right? How do we stay on track? /// A good beginning is keeping our focus on Jesus.

In Philippians 2, Paul warns against strife and vainglory. His prescription against both is simple: **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”**

I will leave you with that thought.

Do this – keep the mind of Christ – and you will be blessed and will be a blessing to others. Do this and the ministry of this church will expand beyond these walls. Do this and the Kingdom of Heaven will be yours.