

Sermon For Layreaders

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

By Brian McKee

From our second lesson: “and he looked round about on them which sat about Him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For Whosoever shall do the will of GOD, the same is my brother, and my sister and my mother.”

Throughout the Gospel we find that Jesus saw the potential to be a disciple in many different people. Including people who had been shunned by society; like Levi, the tax collector. Jesus shattered the expectations of the people even further when He, and His disciples, became guests at the dinner table of Levi. Jesus saw potential in Levi, even though tax collectors were hated by the people as they were known to be dishonest and to cheat people in their tax collections.

Jesus was correct about Levi’s potential. We now know Levi, the tax collector, by another name, St. Matthew. We know him as the author of the first of the four Gospels, and, therefore of the first book of the New Testament.

In today’s second lesson, Jesus teaches us that His followers are a family, indeed that his family of followers are more important than His, or our, biological family. That family of followers takes many forms, the Communion of Saints, being the saints of the past, the disciples in the process of becoming saints, and the saints of the future. We also include our local church parish or congregation, any religious order, perhaps a bible study group or a church women’s society, maybe a parish choir, or choir practice, and many other groups that bind us together.

Throughout His earthy ministry, Jesus chose to eat with, have fellowship with, and to call to be His disciples, people, like Levi the tax collector, who were outcasts from society, who were on the margins of society, or who were the victims of snobbery or prejudice. Christ made it clear that people whom society considered not the be likely candidates for discipleship are often the ones he chooses. This should teach us that we are not the ones who regulate or decide who will join Christ's family and we will not make up the guest list at the Master's feast. Christ will make his own guest list and He may surprise us with whom he invites to join his family.

St. Augustine of Hippo is today regarded as one of the great Church Fathers but those who knew him in his younger life would certainly not have considered him a suitable candidate for Christ's family. He indulged in relationships with women whom he was not married and fathered children out of wedlock. He was raised in paganism and long lived in disbelief. Yet, through the faithful prayers of his mother, St. Monica, Augustine eventually accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord. He then turned his life around and the remaining part of his life was concerned with being a great Bishop, pastor, and theologian.

Jesus was a great physician, Jesus raised the dead. He healed the blind, the deaf, the paralyzed, those with leprosy, and all manner of disease, ailments and sickness. But more importantly, Jesus was, and still is, a great physician of souls. Jesus taught us to catch the fish, or lost souls, and bring them into His family, the Church. As someone once said, after we bring in the fish, Jesus will clean them. Jesus will cure the illness of their souls through their acceptance of His prevenient, forgiving grace.

In our Anglican tradition, we are encouraged to be present with and minister to the sick and hurting. Jesus, the great physician, modeled this behavior for us. His presence healed the sick. Anglicanism considers

visiting and helping the sick and needy to be an act of piety, or a practice of grace, that helps us in the process of sanctification.

On pages 308 to 320 in the Book of Common Prayer, we find prayers and psalms that we may use when we are praying for those who need us. These prayers, apart from a few that indicate they are to be used only by priests, are prayers that any of us can use as members of the family of Christ. In addition, the physical presence of the members of the family of Christ encourages those who need our prayers. One example of this is in our breakfast ministry. Our presence and our preparation of food not only helps restore people to physical health but it can always help to restore spiritual health. We never know how many lost souls we encounter at breakfast and in our day to day lives that we can encourage, pray for and help bring into Christ's family.

The Reverend Charles Wesley, and Anglican priest and hymn writer said it like this:

“Help us to help each other, Lord, Each other's cross to bear

Let each his friendly aid afford, and feel his brothers care.

Help us to build each other up, our little stock improves

Increase our faith, confirm our hope, and perfect us in love.

Up into Thee, our living head, let us in all things grow.

Till Thou hast made us free indeed and spotless here below.

Then when the mighty work is wrought, receive thy ready bride

Give us in heaven a happy lot, with all the sanctified.

Let us remember to always build up each other as fellow members of the family of God. Let us remember Christ's example and welcome all those who God will chose to bring into the family. Let us remember that even though they may not appear, to our imperfect, human eyes, to be suited for members of Christ's family that GOD knows best and that He has a plan for their, and our lives.

Let us remember that, "God does not call the qualified, God qualifies those whom He calls"

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

Let us pray:

Almighty and Ever living God, who sent Thine only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to call Himself a "family of Christ", enable us to welcome with loving hearts, those who Christ calls to be part of his family, enable us to build each other up as members of the family of Christ. Enable us to give our physical presence to both the physically and spiritually sick, and enable us to do thy Hoy will, through Jesus Christ our Lord, the great Physician of Souls. Amen.

