

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
August 8, 2021

Absalom was in rebellion against the king. He wanted to be king. “It is good to be king.” How often are we tempted with the thought that we could do a better job? The Lord appoints whom He appoints to positions of leadership. Envy and jealousy often get in the way. Yes, you might be able to do a better job, but it was not appointed to you. What a simple principle that is so hard to follow because we are tempted to think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

We see a further revelation of the heart of David. Rather than be thankful that Absalom was out of the way, he lamented the death of his son, even though he was an enemy of the king. How much like the Lord this truly is. The Lord does not delight in the condemnation of any, but desires that all would come into salvation. David’s lament is exactly what the Lord did do for us. He came and died in our place. In while yet we were sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. We who have been in rebellion against the authority of God deserve death, but our Savior takes our place. There is only One who is the true king, and that is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the reality of this world, we do well to follow the path of righteousness. Paul is telling the Ephesians and us what this kind of life looks like. Concerning honesty, there are so many ways in which our language has become so dismissive. “How are you doing?” “Fine, and you?” Sure, this kind of greeting will take place, but behind this is a reality where sometimes, maybe even often, we do not really want to know how another is doing. If they actually take the invitation, we are quick to speak platitudes and not engage them where they are and in the circumstance in which they find themselves. This is where the rule of “Do as you would be done by,” and “Treating your neighbor as you want to be treated” is so important. Yes, be friendly, but also be willing to engage. If someone asks for you to pray for them, do not dismiss them – as I have witnessed many doing – but, if possible, stop right then and there and pray with them. To not take advantage of the appointments the Holy Spirit gives you is to grieve the Holy Spirit.

Of course we get angry, but watch yourself. Is it because there is a wrong that has happened, or because you have been slighted? Someone does something to you, it generates anger, but take care lest you think of the other in ways that are condemning. If you are in a position to bring another to confession of their sin, fine, but always be willing to let sins go also. Harboring grudges may be a favorite activity for some, but it only produces wickedness. Free the grudges and let them go. This is what we are taught in the Lord’s prayer, “Forgive us as we forgive others.

In this world of increasingly letting others pay our bills, be diligent to do your part. I’ve seen too many times those who proclaim how conservative they are, condemning giving money away, and yet, they themselves are selfish and greedy. It ought not be this way. The Lord loves a cheerful giver. We are to work for our wages. Sure, many are retired, but there is still work to be done. The harvest is white, but few are the workers who will enter into the field and work. The church should be the first with a plentitude of workers, but alas, we too buy into this world’s thinking about going off and having fun rather than doing what the Holy Spirit would have us do. In whatever you do, do it as serving the Lord.

Put away the malice which is so rampant in our world. Whatever it takes, do not buy into the incessant negative talk, often portrayed as being positive. Sometimes, the best way to deal with things honestly is to say nothing at all. This is what meant when we instructed in the eighth commandment to put the best possible construct on things.

How do we do all of these things? This is where we are instructed to be imitators of Christ. On the one hand, it may seem a little cheeky to imagine that I can be just like Christ, but on the other hand, is this not what we are told to do? In a way, it's almost as if God is saying, "Let's pretend that they are not selfish, self-serving indulgent creatures and treat them as our child." The amazing thing is that when we actually and earnestly put on Christ and seek to practice the things which the Lord instructs, we actually begin to be transformed into something that we could never have been before. In simple terms, this is the journey of salvation. For as many as believe and who put on Christ, we actually begin to be somewhat like Him. In the end, we either will be, or will be hellish creatures with contempt for God.

But I give you a grave warning, lest you fall into the same trap that was produced those who confronted Jesus. We are talking about what the Lord is doing from the inside out. Outwardly, some will seem to be just as cantankerous as they were before the journey with Jesus began. But inside, step by step, the Lord will conform those who are His to His image. We do not live by bread alone, but by every word which comes forth from the mouth of God.

Jesus said He is the bread of heaven. In a purely physical sense, the common metaphor of speaking of bread refers to all of the things we need to physically live. But we should go to the next level and see that we are not just physical beings, but also spiritual beings. There is more to each of us than just flesh and blood. Jesus came to give us His life. For every believer, there is now more than there was when we were physically born.

God provided for the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. Jesus provides for us as we wander through the wilderness of this life. I like the term 'Shadowlands' to describe this age. As Saint Paul said it, we now look in a mirror dimly, but then face to face and we shall know even as we have always been fully known. We need food for the journey. We need spiritual food. Amidst the mystery of the communion we take each week is the reality of Jesus providing the spiritual food we need for the coming week. Mind you, I pray for you and me that we have an ordinary week, but none of us knows what tomorrow will bring, but the Lord does. Rather than worrying about what will come – for the Lord has instructed us to live knowing that each day has enough of its own concerns – we are to look to Him, the One who knows all of our days, and be comforted with the comfort He gives in the Gospel. Not only that, but to comfort one another with the comfort we ourselves have received through Him.

To partake fully in a life of faith is to know that no matter what comes, we have the Advocate who goes before us. Our Lord provides for our needs even before we ask. In while yet we were still sinners, Jesus went to the cross so that each one of us would have the opportunity to be reconciled through Him with the Father forever. You have life in Christ. Learn each day how to increasingly live the life He has given you. Be on guard lest these precious things slip away.

There are people in this world – even people we love dearly – who are in rebellion against the Lord. Pray that their eyes would be opened. Also, pray that you may remain faithful no matter the test that comes upon you. The Lord has given you eternal and precious gifts, more precious than this life which you are now living. The call He has given you is eternal.

May the Lord open your hearts, minds, souls, and the whole of your being to the truth which He has given you in the gift of faith which is yours. Learn from Him what it means to be faithful. May the Lord grant you a faithful journey this coming week. May He open your eyes to see more clearly the great and good gifts which are yours in Him. Be blessed and be a blessing to those whom you meet along the way. Live in His love knowing that He who first loved us will complete you in Him. Amen.

