

15th Sunday after Pentecost
September 17/18, 2022 Sermon

We are shrewd. We know how to connive in this world. Some are better than others. In a moment of speaking the reality of this world's situation, Jesus is telling us where to begin. I heard a talk one time that said that 'original sin' is not found in the bible. If one means those two words put together in a sentence, they are right, but right there, in the middle of chapter three in Genesis is what is being communicated, it is the origin of sin.

We know the result of sin and that is separation from God. But the origin of sin is obfuscated in this age by the sin itself. What is it? It is what took down the devil and a third of the heavenly host. God has given free will. That is, the ability to think on our own, reason for ourselves, and make determinations. We all have that ability and this is no sin, for everything God has created is good. From the infant to the old one, we all have the ability to think and do as we so desire. The limitation is imposed by those around us and the physical limitations of God's creation. But in our minds, we sometimes convince ourselves that we can even violate these things.

We know what sin produces, but what produces sin? It is pride. It is the one thing we often do not see in ourselves and the one thing we all most disdain in another. It is the individual setting up on their own without care for their neighbor. It is the self thinking more highly of themselves than they ought. It is the diabolical which leads us to do things just to show that we are better than our neighbor.

The wicked one looked at God and said, "I will be like the Most High." There is the original sin. He spoke to our first parents and whispered the same thing. They set up on their own. So we are under the curse of pride, but Jesus has come to set us free from the curse. How has He done this? How does He do this? The Most High became one of us and came as a servant of all. He has shown us the way. The opposite of thinking more highly of yourself is to not think of yourself at all, but getting there is the journey. By the way, by no means does Jesus ever teach us to be a doormat, or allow others to run roughshod over us, but He shows us that the reality that humility is the opposite of pride. It is the cure. Jesus does the surgery and humility is the added ingredient to bring about a full, genuine, and eternal cure.

This is where the gift of shrewdness comes in. A steward is released from his duties. He is a good manager, but does not know the work over which he has managed. There is no fault in this. We often find good managers who do not know how to do the actual work. A teacher may be a good teacher, but not actually able to do what they are teaching. It is a gift of shrewdness God gives. This servant is thinking of self preservation. And how many of us would be willing to declare that we often do not often think of our selves first? It is the sin of pride alive and well in each of us.

The servant comes into the realm of mercy and grace. One cannot play with the things of God without the reality of God's power grabbing hold. If even because of sin we come into mercy and grace, God will effect His work in us. Is that not what happens through our baptism? We are sinners, separated from God, but He lovingly brings us ever closer to Him. Truth be told, I have never met anyone yet who did not like receiving a bunch of grace and mercy.

The servant goes to those who owe the master and says, "How much do you owe?" He quickly changes the number and makes the situation much better for the debtor. Are there any of you here who would not like to receive the same? You owe one hundred thousand? Make it fifty. The one who does this? What do you think of them? Sure, you may wonder what the

catch is. After all, if it were me, I would not do that. I'll bet you would if it meant saving your hide. You see, the gift which has been perverted into pride is perhaps best summed up in the word, "gumption." Motivation, finesse, drive, by whatever word you wish to use, it brings us to the place of action. Faith is the foundation of believe and when we believe, we act. Your belief always speaks of your faith. Where your faith is, there your heart will be also. You tell the world what you believe by what you do, how you act, and what you seek. Our Lord says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and then all these things will be added."

So what is this parable really about? It is about mercy and grace. We all are debtors and owe God. He created us, we are His, but we have begun this life thinking and acting as if we were our own. Jesus does not come and cut our debt in half. He takes the whole of it and sets us free to live a new life. To be sure, we fall back into the sinful pattern and take up ownership of our lives and fall back into debt. This is why we are to be a people of repentance. Every time we receive a nudge from the Holy Spirit, we are to repent. The servant in this parable is acting out repentance. He knows his situation is dire and he uses all his gumption to make things better. Sinning? Absolutely! But, instead of running on his own steam, he is now using the things of God to bring about a better situation. Use what the Lord gives and it will grow in you something new. Come sinner, eat the bread, drink the wine. The Lord will do His work even if you come as a sinner. Mind you, it is always better to come with a right attitude and mind, but the Lord always begins with where we are.

Greater is He who is in us than anything in all of creation. For those who come to love the Lord, He has promised that everything will work together for good, for He will conform you to the image of Christ. This too is why we should always repent of thinking that we are better than others. That is nothing less than pride at work, eating away at the goodness of God which has been placed in our hearts.

This world is filled with strife. Yes, we lament, but also do not fall into the place where you lift yourself up as better than another because you know the gift of grace which is yours. You cannot forgive the debt of another, but you can offer to cut it in half. Ah, the shrewdness of this world which we see every day. If only believers would use the shrewdness they have been given for the things of God. And so, the challenge is laid before us.

Even if we begin with selfish motive – and we all do – keep on doing things the way the Lord leads us to do them. It is not about being perfect, for this is the work of our Savior, but about where our heart is. We were created to serve. And Jesus? He came serving us. He still serves us. The catch? Love. God's love is poured out in what he has done. In while yet we were sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. He did this in order that all who come in faith may be made like Him, the perfect, repentant (remember the baptism of repentance that opened His earthly ministry), willing, and obedient servant of the Father.

Jesus has done this, He is doing it, and will continue until you are made perfect even as He is perfect. Come just as you are, without one plea and be filled with His mercy, grace, and goodness. Abide richly in Him and use the gumption He has given you for all that it is worth. Learn to serve the Master of us all, the Good Shepherd, Jesus!

This wretched sinner, filled with pride, has sought to demonstrate to you how to place others before yourself. Go and do likewise. Let Jesus lead you from where you are to where you will be, with Him in eternal glory. Our good and gracious Lord has paid the whole price and asks that we join Him on the grand adventure which shall never end. Jesus says, "Come, follow me." I look forward to seeing what He will make of you! Amen.