

Unison Opening Words ~ *Common Prayer: Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*

Lord, you are coming in glory to bring the fullness of peace, healing, and justice. Teach us to wait when you would have us wait. And teach us to act when you would have us act. Fill us up with so much expectation for your coming kingdom that we cannot help but enact it now. Amen.

Traditional Service Liturgy Following Opening Hymn **and** Contemporary Service Liturgy Following The Lord's Prayer before the Scripture Reading: This We Believe Document 'Article VII and VIII'

Article VII – Of Original or Birth Sin

Original sin standeth not in the follow of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

Article VIII – Of Free Will

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

- Luke 15:1-7.
- There is a beautiful hymn that Chelsea Hemenway has sung for us that invites us – weak and wounded sinners – to come to Jesus.
 - And then once in his presence, the invitation deepens – our intimacy and known-ness with and of Jesus deepens – to sing to Jesus, to fall on Jesus, to cry to Jesus, to dance for Jesus, and to fly to Jesus.¹
 - We are invited to do all of these things and **live**.
 - Sure, we could do all of these things on our own or with others.
 - We would live for a moment, and likely for moments beyond those moments.
 - But what Jesus offers us in coming to him is life like we have never known.
 - It is life that we have only just begun to taste and it is life that can only be savored in eternity because of the one true Savior.
 - No one else can offer, neither can anyone else deliver what he can.
 - What he offers and delivers is salvation.
- The text identifies *tax collectors and sinners* as the unsavory sort that came to Jesus that day.
 - They came to Jesus to listen – a sign of their recognition and ownership that something needed to change:
 - Something that would affect their environments.
 - Something that would affect their relationships.

¹ "Untitled Hymn," Chris Rice - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CdML_8uY18

- Something that would affect their behaviors.
 - Something had to change in them – and Jesus was the fount, the wellspring, the source of that change.
- Scripture reveals the actions of the Triune God as truth.
 - Scripture attests Jesus as the Word of God who was made incarnate in the world in order to serve, teach, love and save humanity.
 - Our Scripture declares from beginning to end, “Our God is a God who saves. (1) Our God is a God who moves towards us – purposefully – for our salvation.”
 - To say this in theological terms, Jesus’ Christology is inextricably bound to his Soteriology.
 - Who Jesus is is what Jesus does. Jesus saves.
- The Pharisees and scribes grumbled – they indignantly complained about Jesus’ chosen companions:
 - Maybe because they thought Jesus foolish for lowering himself to the level of tax collectors and sinners.
 - Maybe because Jesus was now as soiled as those sinners, their shame communicable through common space over a common meal.
 - Or maybe – just maybe – the scribes and Pharisees grumbled because they were jealous – jealous that Jesus chose the company of sinners and tax collectors rather than themselves.
 - The truth is that *had* the scribes and Pharisees joined the group near to Jesus, they would have been welcomed.
 - Because that is who our Jesus is – one who saves, and (2) whose first saving act is unconditional welcome.
 - So learned in the Law and tradition were the scribes and Pharisees that they only knew conditional welcome.
 - That kept them apart – both physically and at the heart.
- Jesus tells them a parable about a shepherd and lost sheep.
 - In Jesus’ day shepherds were always the lowly ones.
 - If you could employ a shepherd, then you, yourself, were not a shepherd.
 - Shepherds knew their role – protector.
 - And they knew their reality – (3) that what they protected was worth more and could cost them their very lives if lost.
 - A sheep wanders off – likely following its own appetites – its own free will – which lands the sheep in danger.
 - The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine in the fold to seek out and save the one.
 - Salvation begets celebration.
- What surprises me in this text is that the scribes and Pharisees likely thought Jesus was just one more lost sheep among the throng of tax collectors and sinners.
 - But Jesus was not lost.
 - And while the tax collectors and sinners may have one day been *the lost sheep*, they were not lost that Luke 15 day.

- They had been recovered. Jesus had saved them.
 - Jesus longs for his words to resonate not only in the ears but in the hearts of those not yet saved...
 - That day the scribes and the Pharisees did not yet realize they were the ones in need of saving...
 - By first repenting from their pride, their indignance, their self-righteousness.
- Who are the modern-day *tax collectors and sinners* among us?
 - Drug dealers; pimps; porn peddlers
 - Muggers; thieves; traffickers; criminal gangs; swindlers; and terrorists;
 - Not to mention unfaithful partners; delinquent, absent, or negligent parents;
 - Elder abusers; cheating taxpayers; predators; computer hackers; con artists;
 - Crooked politicians and the people who voted for them.²
 - “These are the kinds of people who threaten and hurt the rest of us, who often manage to walk away from their crimes and misdeeds, and who leave the rest of us frustrated, angry, and feeling vindictive.”³
 - These lifestyles are morally and socially unacceptable.
 - They are deemed as such by every major religious and moral tradition.
 - The anger we feel from the harm we have experienced at the hands of these perpetrators is real.
 - The moral and legal accountability they ought to face is real.
 - The transformative power of Jesus’ message is also very real.
 - Because we might look upon these persons – these lost sheep – and say “let them go.”
 - “Don’t let the gate hit you on your way out of the pasture.”
 - “Good riddance.”
 - And we may feel justified in our rejection of others.
 - Jesus shows and calls us to a higher way.
 - (4) Our justification is only through the rejection of sin – through repentance – not through the rejection of others.
 - For Jesus – no life – no matter what – is without meaning.
 - No life – no matter what – is without value.
 - No life – no matter what – is not worth saving.
 - If we were the one, would we want to hear the ninety-nine grumble “let her go – good riddance”?
 - I wouldn’t.
 - “For Jesus, *sinners* are something more than bottom feeders and the scum of the earth; they are the **lost** who are being **found** through his preaching, teaching, and table fellowship, and whose return gives rise to a supreme joy that overwhelms all other considerations.”⁴

² *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke Vol II* 80.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

- Friends, we are not the arbiters of who is saved.
 - We are not the arbiters of who is worthy of saving.
 - Any sinner is first and foremost a child of God.
 - And we are not all that different from these sinners.
 - We share the same ole feet of clay as everyone else.
 - As such, all sin, including our sin, is serious, and to downplay or minimize it downplays and minimizes Jesus' love that found us and saves us.
 - Without this honesty "salvation degenerates into a trivial matter of basically nice people becoming nicer, good folk getting even better. If this view of humanity were true, [Bishop Will Willimon says] Jesus should have started a self-help seminar rather than gone to the cross."⁵
- What *does* set us apart from these sinners is our being found by Jesus.
 - Jesus saved us.
 - (5) Salvation is not something done by us, it is something Jesus does in us.
 - "Faith is not what we think or feel; faith is what God gives us, a work that God does through us. Our faith is a sign that God has indeed brought us to sure conviction that Jesus saves us, even us."⁶
 - Your presence here and listening to this message evidences that Jesus' transformation is taking root in you – drawing you away from sin and towards salvation.
 - It happened and is happening to you, to us!
 - Why, then, would we and do we doubt, deny, or seek to limit Jesus' transformative power for and in others?
- It is easier to follow in the footsteps of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - It is much easier and quicker to judge and condemn.
 - Long is the path of hope.
 - Longer still the arc of justice.
 - And that is exactly where our Jesus who saved us, thereby making us different, calls us to commit to acting differently as we serve alongside him in saving his kin, our neighbors.⁷
 - Sinful behavior should absolutely be corrected.
 - Doing so ensures the protection of the community.
 - But these consequences are secondary to Jesus' primary aim – saving each precious and beloved child of God.
 - This is hope's triumph, born of love, through our God who came to save.
- The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:38-39).

⁵ Will Willimon, *This We Believe* 99.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

- Today we add to Paul's list that (6) *neither will we* be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - We cannot choose to live like there are folks that cannot be saved.
 - That there are lost that do not deserve to be found.
- There is salvation for sinners.
 - That truth "leads us to regard all people in the light of God's saving intent for all and to deal with them as God deals with them"⁸ – with love, forgiveness, with grace.
 - This we believe.

1 – Our God is a God who moves towards us – purposefully – for our salvation.

2 – Jesus' first saving act is unconditional welcome.

3

4 – Our justification is only through the rejection of sin – through repentance – not through the rejection of others.

5 – Salvation is not something done by us, it is something Jesus does in us.

6 – Neither will we...

⁸ Ibid., 106.