

Peace be unto you from God, our father, and from Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

He just wanted to have a nice dinner party, that Pharisee, at least that was the initial appearance. But there was an elephant in the room. The Pharisees, Luke tells us, we're watching Jesus carefully and they had been for some time, they wanted to trick Him or trap Him or tempt Him to get Jesus to say or do something, anything. So they could discredit Him, strip Him of His followers, get rid of Him, put this Jesus problem to bed once and for all. But they couldn't, no matter how many times they had tried. Oh, they were a persistent bunch, but they had a problem, something they didn't understand about Jesus. They kept thinking He was just like them. So they kept setting traps and tricks and temptations that would work on them, but then were baffled when they didn't work on Jesus. They thought themselves the best, the brightest, the most educated in all of Israel. Surely amongst them they could come up with something.

So what was it they didn't get? What was their miscalculation? You may be thinking that it's that Jesus is not just an ordinary man, but the Son of God incarnate. And you'd be right on that. But that wasn't Jesus's edge here. For though the Son of God, He did not use His power and wisdom as God for himself. For others, yes, like the man with dropsy, healing him. But the scriptures say and tell us that Jesus was like us in every way except without sin. So it's not that Jesus somehow used secret super God powers to keep frustrating the Pharisees, it's rather this, dead men don't care. And Jesus knew He was a dead man walking. He kept telling His disciples that He was going to be crucified. In fact, a number of chapters earlier in Luke 9 we're told He set His face to go up to Jerusalem. Why? To die for the sinful world to which He came.

He knew this must happen just as He fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the blind receiving their sight, the deaf, their hearing, the lame being able to walk. So He must fulfill the other prophecies about Him, mainly about His suffering and His death. That as Pastor Pope rightly pointed out last Sunday to us who were here as he quoted from Isaiah 53, that Jesus would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. This is after all why He came. And this would happen, every word of God would be fulfilled. So Jesus didn't really care about what the Pharisees cared about. He wasn't concerned about His social standing or about wealth. He didn't care about being invited to the banquet of the next Pharisee's house, the next Sabbath or what seat He might be given. He didn't care, for dead men don't care about such things.

What He did care about, however, was them. They were going astray. And since Jesus came into the world to save all sinners, He came for them as well as a man with dropsy. So that's why He focused attention on this man with dropsy that He healed, and whether it was proper to heal Him on the Sabbath or not. Surely if it

was one of their children or grandchildren or other relatives, they'd help him or her. Or if it even was one of their livestock, they'd help it, even on a Sabbath day. So why shouldn't Jesus help that man?

So He interrupted a perfectly respectable dinner party to talk about a man with a terrible disease. You might say that would be one sure way to not get invited back, but again, dead men don't care. More important to Jesus was to teach about mercy than to make sure that He would get His belly filled the next week. So He criticized the guests because when the announcement was made, dinner is served, they went rushing by. Maybe Jesus got a few elbows in the side as they rushed to get their places of honor. After all, who did Jesus think He was? He wasn't part of their rotation. He wasn't family or a rich neighbor. So maybe some thought be gracious and not critical, Jesus. But again, dead men don't care.

More critical to Jesus and proper etiquette or social status was to teach something about humility in the sight of God. And so finally, one last dig to the host of that banquet, "I see that you only invited those of advantage to you, your relatives, those in your dinner party rotation, those who can pay you back. Why don't you invite those who cannot? Let's say the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, they're the ones who need your generosity and care, though they cannot pay you back now, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." Note that last line, "You will be repaid in the resurrection of the just."

Reference to that resurrection. In other words, Jesus in effect was calling them dead men too, for only the dead can be resurrected. So all those things that they cared about weren't going to make one bit of difference when they were dead. Why do you care about these things now? By the way, that last question is directed also to you and to me, not just those Pharisees. Why do we care about so many things of this world and place them in higher priority over the things of God? I think the answer is that by nature we are sinful and prideful beings. We seek to find our lives in worldly things. We even attempt to try to save or try to save our lives.

And who amongst us does not want to be well thought of and not forgotten or brushed aside? Or we may not have our sights set on being rich, but at least we want to be comfortable. We do want to be recognized by others. We do want to move up in the world and not down. You see, pride lurks within each of us. Pride that thinks if not saying like a young child, "You're not the boss of me." Don't we sometimes think like that, even if we don't express it verbally? And we do so even to God. But like Jesus with each and every passing day, we're one day closer to our death. And while we don't like to think about that, it does change one's thinking and priorities. Fancy house, the big vacation, your social standing, a highly coveted invitation to the banquet of the year. None of these things matter so much when you've just received news that you have cancer or another life-threatening disease.

Neither does that squabble you had with your neighbor or your wife this past week. Or the revenge you plotted, or how you're going to get even. You see fellow Christians, we have a great freedom in Christ Jesus. Freedom from the worries and cares and concerns and anxieties and competitions of this world. From all the things that only divide us and separate us also from God. These things are all self-serving in the end and not God-serving. They're all about me, myself, and I. What's good for me, what I want.

Stop and listen to yourself someday and notice how many times me and I, those pronouns are found in your conversations with others. But dead men and women don't care what people think about them. Think about it. Those in Heaven don't care about what we think about them. They don't obsess over who gets what seats of honor, or if they'll be invited to the big Christmas party coming up at the end of this year. For after all, they're now with Jesus. And that's all that matters. What they knew on this earth by faith, they now know by sight. All these things we fret about in this world don't matter.

But you say, "I'm not dead yet." True enough, but don't follow up by saying so I must care about these things. Jesus wasn't dead either, but He knew His scriptures and that every word of God must be fulfilled. Like these, which were spoken over us at our baptism from Romans 6, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried, therefore, with Him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

So in a matter of speaking, you and I are dead people because we've been baptized. Oh yes, we still have a physical death to go through, but even that death has been transformed by our baptism, better to say maybe transformed by Christ and His death and resurrection given to you and me in baptism. So that it is now simply death is now the pathway from life to life, from this world to the next, from faith to sight. Because of our baptism, we have a part in the resurrection of the just. For in baptism, God declared you and me righteous or just. Our debt, our faults, our every sin, forgiven and washed away by water and the Holy Spirit, by Jesus's blood, by the Word of God. All of these apply to you and me there united to Christ to live with Him now and live with Him forever.

If you have any, even a tiny bit of doubt about that, hear what the words spoken to you said this morning in the absolution, in the stead of Christ, you heard the words, "I forgive you all your sin. Or by Jesus soon here at the Lord's table, take eat. This is my body given into death for your sins. Drink of it, all of you. This is my blood shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins."

That's what God says through His word to us. And so it is fulfilled here this day, and it will be fulfilled for all the faithful Christians in the end. So you now, like

Jesus, get to walk in newness of life, which is not putting you back under God's law, commanding you, be new, but rather telling you of the reality that you no longer have to worry because dead people don't care, and you have died with Christ and been raised with Him. Christ is your life, not the things of this world. So your stuff, the size of your house and bank accounts, your social standing about these things, don't worry because you have from God Almighty what's greater and more lasting than them all.

You have what death cannot take away, for your life is now hidden with Christ. And that's the ultimate freedom, a freedom to enjoy the things of this world and life, the things of this creation as did Jesus. But not to find your life or value in them, or to let them rule over you. And so control what you do or say or how you live, because you're dead to the world but alive to God in Christ Jesus. You don't need what the world counts as riches and what you do need, Christ himself will provide.

And honor? What worldly honor could surpass the honor we have already received in being made children of God? So while you may never get a plaque with your name on it, saying that you're the man or woman of the year, or an MVP trophy, or a medal of honor, you have something far better and more lasting. Your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and your name is listed on the guest list for the heavenly wedding feast that has no end. Therefore, the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind that Jesus referenced to the ruler of the Pharisees, the host, those who've been invited to the feast, guess what? That's you and me.

We were poor with sin. We were crippled by the ways of unrighteousness. We were slaves to sin. God has freed us through Jesus Christ and the humbled, the lowly who've been exalted to a higher place, again, that's you and me. Those in Christ need not worry because they don't have to. You can show hospitality to strangers. You can keep God's word and speak its truth even in the face of mocking and persecution from the world around you. You can share and give what you have, which begs the question, what else? What else am I hanging on to that I don't really need when I'm dead? So why hold on to those things now?

The dead made alive in Christ don't care. They're freed. They're baptized and cleansed by the word of Christ, and that is you and me. We are free. This morning as we began the divine service, we repented of not living as God desires. And in a sense, we died a little death as we recalled our baptism and then received the forgiveness of all our sin. It was like a little resurrection to a new life already here and now. We have heard the word of God and all that Jesus has done for us time and time again. What He supplies and gives to us without fail. Soon we come to receive a foretaste of the Heavenly feast that awaits us. A feast, however, that awaits us today, who have been crucified and risen with Christ. Jesus's own body

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and blood that keep and preserve us steadfast in the Christian faith until the Lord on the day of His choosing calls us from life to life, from this world to the next, from faith into Heaven's sight.

Yet it's all ours now. When you live in that way, the world might look at you and regard you, kind of like the Pharisees did Jesus, not being able to quite make out what you're all about. Why don't you care about what the rest of the world chases after? Why do you have a sense of peace and freedom? You can tell them, because dead people don't care. And even now, dead to sin, I live in Jesus Christ, my Lord.

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, to life everlasting. Amen.