

SERMON - Healing of the Woman on the Sabbath - Luke 13:10-17, November 26, 2017

Our God is a God of love, kindness, forgiveness, care, and self-sacrifice. When man is at his best he comes closest to these ideals. At his worst, man can be as far away from these virtues as it is possible to imagine. We can look at history, past and current, and see how man has not lived up to these ideals: slavery, bigotry, persecution, murder, abuse, hatred and all kinds of sins and crimes against humanity. But more important than that, we can look deep within ourselves. We can examine our own feelings, motives, beliefs and actions. We can analyze the words that we have spoken to others. How close, or how far do we come in our lives from these ideals of love for our fellow man, kindness, self-sacrifice, and support of others? Do we love all of God's creatures the same, or do we judge others based on the color of their skin, their ethnic origin, their culture, or their social status?

Jesus is worshipping in a synagogue on the sabbath. He shows compassion and heals a woman who has suffered, crooked and bent over, for eighteen years. Instead of rejoicing and being happy for this poor woman, the leader of the synagogue is angry that Jesus has healed on the sabbath. Jesus calls the leader of the synagogue a hypocrite. The dictionary defines hypocrisy as "a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principals that one does not really possess." Hypocrisy is to pretend to feel a certain way but in reality to conceal how we really feel. In Greek, hypocrisy means to pretend, to play a theatrical part, like in a play. The leader of the synagogue has a moral obligation to live by the standards of the Lord, yet there is a wide gap between his profession and the actuality. Leadership is a great responsibility and a very heavy burden, because unworthy leaders can lead those who are under their authority to despair and loss of faith.

Jesus is the Son of God. Only God has the authority to judge us. We do not have the authority to judge others, even this ruler of the synagogue that we read about today. The same God who called the rich man "Fool!" and who calls the leader of the synagogue and the pharisees "Hypocrites, a brood of vipers and whitewashed tombs" tells us at the same time that if we call another man "Fool!" we are liable to the fires of Hell (Matthew 5:22). In as much as Jesus calls this man a hypocrite, yet Jesus loves him, wants him to understand correctly the laws of God, to see the errors of his ways and to repent and be saved. We are also called upon to imitate Jesus by loving all men, regardless of their sins and offenses and not to judge anyone but ourselves. We do not have the ability to see into the heart of another person and we do not know all of the circumstances of that person's life, but we do have the ability and obligation to see into our own hearts, to judge ourselves, and to repent, seek forgiveness, and change our attitudes and behavior.

The Jews had specific laws and interpretations of those laws. Many of those laws and ways of life, permitted by God, are abhorrent in our eyes today. Human slavery, even having fellow Jews as slaves, polygamy, levirate marriage, hypocritical sabbath laws and many other things were tolerated by God because of human weakness. Mankind was spiritually blind to God's goodness and didn't understand how to do better. The bringing of man closer to God was a slow process, with God showing much patience and forbearance. With the coming of the Messiah, the time to correct our ways and live closer to the ideals of a Godly life has reached a climax. A New Covenant is established, and the Law is now taken to new heights, bringing us closer to God and the Truth. The crux of the matter is that we should do better not because we have to obey laws that we may or may not understand and that we may or may not agree or disagree with. We call that legalism. Instead we should do better because we see and want to do better in our hearts, because we believe and understand the ways of love, kindness, forgiveness, purity and truth and therefore *choose* to do better. This was the goal of the ministry of Jesus and this was the message of St. Paul when he writes about the Law in his epistles. Jesus didn't use His authority as God and simply demand that we obey Him. The

Lord painfully suffered in patience by word and deed in order to teach sinful mankind, in order to capture our hearts and to give sight and understanding to our spiritual blindness. This awesome task did not end with the Lord, but was only the beginning. After the Ascension, the baton was passed to the Lord's disciples to continue this difficult, awesome and holy work to preach and teach the Good News.

Let us pray to the Lord that our hearts would be open to understanding. May the Lord help us to gain insight, wisdom and knowledge, to see things as they really are. May we be faithful to our baptism and be children of illumination. May we be saved from foolishness and hypocrisy, and instead live our lives based on righteousness and truth. May we live clean and pure lives in honesty and faithfulness. May we be true imitators of our Lord and offer others heartfelt love, kindness, empathy, care and understanding. This we ask through God the Father and His only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.