

Drunkard and Glutton
3rd Sunday after Pentecost (A)
Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30

Pastor Kelly K. Faulstich
Grace Lutheran Church
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These last couple of weeks, I have embraced a different role, a different aspect of who I am. While being pastor will always be part of who I am and what I do, these last 2 weeks and this coming week, I have been living and working as a student. Staying down in Hyde Park, I've been participating in a summer residency that is part of my Doctor of Ministry degree through the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and the Association of Chicago Theological Schools.

While I will forever be a student, always learning more about life and ministry and people and theology, I am thankful for this opportunity and the support on the behalf of this congregation as I gather with pastors and preachers and professors from around the country and from around the world.

My classmates and professors come from a variety of Christian backgrounds. There are Baptists and Episcopalians and United Church of Christ pastors. There are Nazarenes and Methodists and Presbyterians and fellow Lutherans. Some are from the Chicagoland area and others come from as far away as Sweden and India.

Part of the joy for me in this time with other preachers is when we discuss our own contexts, the churches and nursing homes and other places we serve. This last Friday, one of my Canadian classmates presented us all with pens that said Canada, in honor of Canada Day. Aware that our own national holiday was just around the corner, some of us Americans speculated what we might share with one another as this weekend arrived.

There were choruses of O Canada with a competitive refrain of the Star Spangled banner and other patriotic songs. But the verse that came to my mind was one of the inscriptions on the Statue of Liberty:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

This is from the Emma Lazarus poem "Colossus." It's on a plaque inside the statue now. It's a beautiful description on why this country was founded, as a place where people could be free, a place where people could have a new start, where people could practice their own faith traditions without fear. And while part of our national holiday celebration is for the many freedoms we have as Americans, as people of faith, we recognize that we aren't entirely free of our own will.

We are reminded in the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness at the beginning of our worship: we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. Sin takes on a variety of forms. It is that separation from God, from each other, and from our selves. We could identify sin as the way we don't take care of neighbor, the way we avoid or don't welcome the tired and poor and huddled masses. Sin is that which we do when we call each other names that are not grounded in love. We see that in the beginning of this morning's gospel:

For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, "He has a demon."
The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say,
"Look! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"

The gospel writers and gospel-time people saw sinners as those who didn't abide by religious law. We see sinners more like Paul describes himself in Romans:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.
But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.
For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

Part of the joy in my residency is rediscovering that which make me so very Lutheran. We are born children of a fallen humanity, we say in the Rite of Baptism. Nothing, nothing that I can do can fix the fallen-ness of me or my sisters and brothers. Made in the image of God, man and woman, yes. But broken and sinful, in need of God's grace.

At the end of our gospel reading, Jesus gives instructions and provides reflections similar to those on the Statue of Liberty, but much more weighty in the lives of us Jesus-followers:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

A yoke, a yoke. A yoke gives guidance. It is a method of disciplining those who are at work.

Paul might add:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.
For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self,
but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind,
making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.
Wretched man that I am!
Who will rescue me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Jesus invites us to take upon his yoke, his guidance and discipline for us. Law.
But Jesus also gives us truest freedom, freedom from and redemption from sin.
Simul justis et peccator, right?

We are at the same time saint and sinner through Jesus.

Jesus comes as Lord, as healer, as the one who welcomes, as divine torch-bearer, as the light of the world.
And Jesus comes to us as host.

You see,
this one who is called drunkard and glutton is called so with good reason.
He ate with people that any good rabbi would know not to eat with.
He talked with people that any good rabbi would know not to talk to.
He healed in ways that went against what any good rabbi would know not to do.

Jesus comes to us as drunkard, as glutton and invites us with those tax collectors.
Jesus invites us with those sinner friends.
Jesus invites us to a feast.

Friends, on this Third Sunday after Pentecost,
On this day before a national holiday,
We give thanks for many things as we gather for worship.

Each of us presents unique thanksgivings,
Maybe for the opportunity to study or the ability to work,
Maybe for friends and family and peace in our lives and our homes.
Maybe for our country and for those who serve in office and abroad.

Friends, even in bondage to sin, unable to free ourselves,
Together, we present thanksgiving for Jesus,
for the meal he hosts,
for his life, death, and resurrection.

Together we present thanksgiving for the glutton and the drunkard
Who calls us and loves us with his bliss and strength, his love and peace.

To the glory of God.