

The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost – 2021

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Ephesians 2:11-22

Mark 6:30-44

There are no such things as blue-collar sins and white-collar sins. It is very fashionable these days to put people into categories. Race, class, education, political ideology – folks are keen to find their supposed tribe and view everyone else skeptically. There are forces at work in our society which are absolutely bent on dividing people into groups. Sin is a great equalizer. There are no such things as blue-collar sins and white-collar sins. The married millionaire who meets his mistress at the Ritz Carlton and the married mill worker who seduces the young lass at the end of the bar to jump into the cab of his truck are engaged in the same wretched business. You should have no doubt, God does not see the divisions that we construct between ourselves. Oh, He sees them, He just doesn't see them.

Someone coined the phrase, blue-collar and white-collar crime, and it's been employed ever since. Blue-collar crime is brutish, straightforward crime – burglary, assault, extortion. White-collar crime is strategic, angling for a big payday – fraud, forgery, embezzlement. The cat who busts your car window to grab your purse and the telemarketing scam artist who just wants your credit card info are equally despicable. There are no such things as blue-collar sins and white-collar sins. This holy house is full of one thing: sinners. There is no division of class, race, education, or political ideology here. Sinners, accountable to God. Sinners, washed in the blood of Christ. Sinners, forgiven by grace. Together, we pursue humility, courage, fortitude, mercy, truth, wisdom and self-control. Together, we renounce pride, deceit, lust, vindictiveness, materialism, greed, and gluttony. Where you fail, I may do better. Where I fail, you might do better but we are all the same. No matter who you look at in this life, they are no different from us in this holy house. Here's an Italian proverb worth remembering: "At the end of the game, the king and the pawn go back in the same box." Everyone is going to stand before God.

A great crowd did all in their power to follow wherever Christ was going. It was a desolate place where Jesus came to be. He saw the crowd and He alone was their shepherd, their very Good Shepherd. St. Luke tells us that He "spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing" (Luke 9:11). Who was gathered there? Had Christ's teaching inspired the hearts of bakers and carpenters and smiths and farmers and housewives and vagabonds? Were older people there, the mentally anguished, those who had lost a spouse, a child to disease? The wealthy, did they suffer from common maladies, were they concerned about the state of their soul? How about those who self-medicated their internal wounds with work, with wine, with worldly philosophy and still couldn't fill the void that silently screamed at them when all was quiet, were they there? They *were* there; the physically weak and the physically strong, sinners of every variety, man in all his wonderful and horrible diversity. They were there.

And there was nothing to eat. The day began to wear away and there were no provisions for this multitude. The disciples were aware of the situation and they sprang into problem solving mode. Their solution was to send the people away, send them off to the market, send them to go and buy something for themselves to eat. Jesus had other designs. "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). What? There were five thousand of them, just the men. The money it would

take to purchase enough bread was more than six months of wages – they didn't have the resources. Five loaves and two fish, barely enough to feed Jesus and His disciples, that's all they had. What do we have? We have an elder who looks like God, that's pretty cool. What do we have? We have an organist who can play Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, that's pretty cool. We have a Pepperidge Farm rep who keeps us stocked with cookies, that's totally cool. We've got air conditioning, we've got a World War II veteran (Army Air Corps), a deacon with oversized biceps, a really tall crucifer (handsome too). Humanly speaking, what are our resources?

Maybe I should ask, what have you come here to receive? What does a sinner like you need? To be sure, this is a pretty place, but is it the aesthetics that brings you here? I hope that you know what you need. St. Mark tell us that when Jesus came ashore "he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). He saw them. He saw their fears and their failures. He saw their daily struggles and the sincerity of their faith. He saw their sorrows and their hopes and their spiritual poverty. He saw that the religion of Israel had turned the richness of God's Word into legalistic twaddle. And He saw what He would do. He had compassion on them. He is the One with the resources. He Himself *is* the resource. Holiness, goodness, love, truth, fidelity, spiritual vigor, eternal righteousness – He is heaven's resource and He would give everything He had. Compassion! You have come here to receive the fruit of Christ's compassion. Death and resurrection fills this house for that is what Christ the Good Shepherd wills to give His sheep. This church is vested with remarkable resources.

He sees you. He pursues you. He has compassion for you. Christ's Word was unleashed in those people's lives and that Word is what brought them to that place. He pursues us through the same Word. He is active through it, to make Himself known, to invade your heart, to instill in you a desire for Him – but make no mistake, it is because He sees you, because He pursues you, because He has compassion for you that you are here. He brought those people to that place, He spoke to them of the kingdom of God in that place, and He fed them in that place. Using resources only He could manage, He fed them. That is you. I would suggest to you that the Lord Christ saw His church through the span of these 21 centuries, how He would gather and teach and feed us and He performed a miracle then to help you see your life in Him now.

Ultimately, Jesus set His face toward a desolate place. Golgotha is barren, a wasteland of pride and avarice and death. That is what is fused into the Son of God's being as He hangs on the cross – lust and faithlessness and hatred and death (all that is unholy and grim and contrary to life). Your sin was placed on Him. He sacrificed Himself, taking your death, determined to give you His life. Compassion; Christ sees you exactly as you are and He does not turn away; He has compassion. His blood pours from His crucified flesh. He sees you. He loves you. He dies for you.

We are honored that God would call us to follow Him. We derive our honor not from the world's accolades, the world's tributes, the world's plaudits – we derive our honor from following Christ, from reflecting His nature, from suffering for bearing His name. We derive our honor from Him, knowing that when we love as He loved and no one notices – He sees us. He honors us by giving us the best seat at His table. Sinners will kneel next to you at this altar. Sinners will open their mouths and receive Christ's body, Christ's blood. There is no other kind

of person who follows Christ. He is indiscriminate with His love, His grace, His forgiveness. We will eat and we will be satisfied. Risen from the dead, Jesus opens His hand and He satisfies our hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The box of the tomb could not hold our King, and therefore no box can hold us. The banquet of heaven flows from our altar, a foretaste of the feast to come. Christ the King has prepared a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine; He has swallowed up death forever (Isaiah 25:6-8). In this place, and wherever we go, we are one in Christ.