

## TRINITY 6

Romans 6:3-7, Matthew 5:20-26.

“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” This morning I bring you greetings from our Lord and Savior who understands our failings, yet through His infinite love, is willing to give us His grace, even in the midst of our sin and unworthiness. Amen

I remember the first time I was training at the altar at my previous church . It was very unnerving because here I was handling the body and blood of Christ at the altar and you cannot help but focus on your own unworthiness. You are there, looking to serve God, and you begin to realize the depth of your personal faults, your many failures and just how far you can turn away from God in your sin. As I often do, I try to express a little humor in a tense and scary situation so I commented that now since I was a leader in the church, I would have to give up drinking and wild women. The head deacon shot me a pointed glare and replied “don’t ruin it for the rest of us.”

In our Gospel this morning, our Lord sets for us a standard that seems impossible to reach. He tells us that “unless our righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” In a simple phrase, we must be perfect to enter the kingdom of heaven, to be blessed, to be worthy of the gift of salvation.

Perfect! Without flaw, without any stain, always meeting our obligations to God. OK, let’s take a poll-everyone who falls into that category, lets see a show of hands. Take a look behind me-those are the only hands raised this morning. How often have we heard that the last perfect man to live on earth, they hung on a cross.

But if we are not perfect, how then shall we enter the kingdom of heaven. How can we achieve salvation no matter how hard we work, even to the extent that such efforts exceed the teachers of the law?

The answer is of course that we cannot. There is no way that by our own efforts we can ever be worthy of the gift God offers us so we must depend on God’s grace, through our faith to be counted among those who are blessed.

St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans helps us understand the depth of God’s grace and His love for us. “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death.....If we have been united to Him in His death, we will certainly be united to Him in His resurrection....that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

There are some Christians who believe that is just about faith. Others who believe it’s about works. For us as Anglicans however, we believe that it is all part of who we are in our relationship with Christ. We understand God’s grace in that we are unworthy to receive anything from Him yet He loves us unfailingly, offers us salvation and the gift of eternal life. We understand that we turn to Him and accept this gift though our faith. That we acknowledge Jesus to be the Son of the living God and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. We know that the nourishment for our faith is contained in scripture and in the sacrament of the altar. And we know that none one may require of us anything that is not contained in scripture for salvation.

Where it often gets fuzzy however is inside us. Is our faith real? Is it manifested in a changed heart? In our works? In our attitude? It’s not just enough to say we believe-we must allow the power of the Holy Spirit to change us, shape us, and mold us. That we do in one simple way-we submit ourselves to God. We set aside our own personal desires and feelings and give ourselves over to Him.

Our Lord tells us that God knows our hearts. If we harbor hate, jealousy, envy, or have caused others pain-Christ tells us “leave your gift in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Every Sunday, before we come to Communion, we are challenged by our priest in regards to our relationship with Christ: “You who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith.”

Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for. We express that faith by submitting our will to our lord and Savior Jesus Christ and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us, change our lives, and bring us closer to him. From this comes the confession of our failings and true repentance in our turning to God.

God knows our hearts. He also knows that we will fail again and again-but He is there to lift us up. We cannot reach out to touch His hand only half way. What He desires of us is all of who we are, our total commitment, our willingness to allow Him to change us, the full submission of our will to His.

The desire of our hearts should be to change our lives, with His help, in thanksgiving for His sacrifice for us at Calvary. To put our own desires first is the sin that separates us from God. “if we say we have no sin, then the truth is not in us.” By giving ourselves to Christ, “God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Let’s take down the walls in our hearts. Let’s commit ourselves to Him without hesitation, without holding anything back. Let God’s love shine brightly in all of us and above all, let us submit ourselves to Him fully and completely. Always remember, it’s not about us-it’s about Him.

We pray:

“Heavenly Father, we know we cannot be perfect. We know we fail everyday in our desire to allow you, through the Holy Spirit, to work in us. We know that often our faith is weak, particularly when we are in conflict, or life’s burdens become overwhelming. May each of us open our hearts fully to your love and your grace, and submit ourselves to your will. And may the greatest desire of our hearts be the righteousness that comes through your son, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” Amen