

Trinity 3

The Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So Jesus spoke to them saying, "I say to you, there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.."

This parable follows on the heels of last week's reading.

In that parable, Jesus told the proud and self-righteous that he would not allow them to taste His supper but that He searches out the highways and hedges to invite the poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind.

These poor, maimed, lame and blind ones are none other than the repentant.

Repentance is to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God.

To consider yourself poor, miserable, wretched and blind and needing everything. Why is this necessary? Because whoever considers himself to be rich and healthy neither needs or seeks help from Christ.

The tax collectors and sinners knew their wretchedness and sought help in Christ.

The Pharisees did not. They considered themselves better than the others.

They didn't think Jesus had anything that they needed.

For this cause Jesus announces, "there is no joy in heaven over you."

To avoid this judgment, today you are called to repent—to humble yourself.

— What does this repentance and humility look like before your neighbor?

It is to treat them as better than yourself.

The Pharisees were upset that Jesus should eat with tax collectors and sinners.

Why? Because they considered themselves to be more worthy of dining with this well-known teacher — they considered the sinners worthy of less. (worthless)

Whenever you treat others beneath yourself or less worthy of your consideration, you are exhibiting an unrepentant heart.

When you strike out at another person in either word or deed, you are saying, "my well-being and emotions are more important than yours."

When you are inconsiderate of another's property you are saying, "my property is more important than yours."

When you gossip and tear down his good name you show that you consider your own name to be of more value than his.

All of these are the fruits of an unrepentant heart and they show that it is really you who are unworthy of God's great kindness and love.

— What does this repentance and humility look like before God?

It is to go to Jesus as the only source of everything you need.

But who today doesn't already seek help from Christ?

Many people call themselves Christian.

Even the Pharisees were not so clumsy as to claim no need for God.

There were *merely* claiming that they could obtain the help of God apart from the man who was sent to them and stood before them.

For this they are condemned along with everyone who follows in their footsteps.

This same attitude is shown today when you say things like, "All I need is Jesus, I don't need Church. I don't need to have the Sacrament. I don't need to hear the sermon — I don't need anyone or anything to help — I only need God."

While it is true that no one else but only God can help you — these statements are wrong-headed and full of the Pharisaic error.

To reject these things as the means that God comes to save you is to reject God.

When you think like that you forget that this very God whom you trust has promised to be present and active among us through means and people.

To sever the connection between God on high and His earthly means of grace is to sever the connection between the God of Israel and Jesus of Nazareth.

— So, repentance is shown in two ways: Before God it is shown by a humble submission to His Word, His Church, His pastors, and His sacraments.

Before men it is shown by considering them more worthy than yourself.

This parable makes it abundantly clear that God saves only the repentant.

The prodigal is emptied of self worth and completely dependent on the father.

From this we learn what humble repentance looks like.

But when we look not at the prodigal but at the Father, we see what God is like.

He does not grudgingly receive His son.

He rejoices. He feasts. He kisses.

When the sinner repents and returns home, "*the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'* It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for [he] was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."

Your sins and lost condition do not repulse Him or cause Him to give up on you.

He does not hate you but loves you enough to keep calling and seeking.

And finding you, as He does today, He puts you on a par with the firstborn.

You who were lost and now are found — you who were dead and now are alive.

And when you arrive back home, the Father does not treat you as a second class son, He does not number you with His servants, the angels, but exalts you to the status of His resurrected Son.

He puts the ring of royalty on your finger and the robe of righteousness on your shoulders. He Himself kisses you and welcomes you into His heavenly home.

In fact, the most amazing thing of all is that God rejoices over your salvation even more than you do!

This is what He wants for you with His whole Being — this is His good and gracious will.

That you consider all others are worth more than yourself and that you humbly submit to His holy Word in all things.

For in this repentant submission you are exalted to God's own right hand.

And in your valuing all others more than yourself, you yourself are valued as His only-begotten Son.

All because this Man, Jesus Christ, receives sinners and eats with them. AMEN.