



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

October 12, 2008

## Pentecost 22

### Pork Barrel Gospel

A couple of weeks ago, the world's economy was thrown into a tailspin. Our Congress considered a bill to aid the economy and address certain issues. The bill failed. A few days later the Senate considered a bill that passed and eventually was signed into law.

The differences in the economic plan considered by both houses were negligible. What made the difference in the vote were the additions to the bill or what were termed the sweeteners that had nothing to do with the economic bailout but were added to sway the politicians to vote for it. It is what we know in the way our country is governed as pork barrel.

Pork barrel items, which have nothing to do with the legislation being considered, are added to the piece of legislation. They are government appropriations used to supply funds for local improvements or causes that of course make the local politicians look good in their constituency. It's been called Pork Barrel since shortly before the civil war. At that time the expression Pork Barrel simply meant the total contributions to a politician's campaign fund but over time it came to be known as the additions to legislation or earmarks.

Pork is usually associated with fat, so the term pork barrel is used to tell that what is being funded is out of the abundance or plenty and not because of necessity.

In our gospel today we have an example of Gospel Pork.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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It is a little amusing to me that Matthew, the most Jewish of gospels is the gospel that contains what we call today pork.

Let me explain.

You see if we read the gospel in its entirety it is a story about a king who invites guests to the banquet and they each give excuses why they cannot come. He then tells his slaves to invite everybody on the streets, good and bad, and they come. Then there is a twist about the man who was not wearing the right garments.

And this is the pork of the gospel.

This story of the man not wearing the right wedding garment is a separate parable. It is about a different issue, but it has been added on to the first to give the appearance like it is all one story. And like pork barrel it has nothing to do with the first parable. The sad thing is that when it is read in its entirety it changes the whole meaning of the first parable.

The obvious reason that it has nothing to do with the first parable is how could a guest be blamed for not being properly dressed for a wedding when he has been brought in literally from the street?

And that's what happened.

The first parable is about the wonderful invitation of God to all his children, good and bad, to come to Gods banquet feast. To come into the kingdom and feed on Gods grace and mercy, on Gods forgiveness and love, on Gods acceptance and welcome.

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It is the parable of the invitation to both good and bad. It is an invitation to everybody so all of us are invited. That is very important for us to remember that Gods invitation to the banquet is for all people. Now we know who we would like to come and who we would not like to come, but it is not our banquet and it is not our kingdom and it is not our invitation.

The second parable is a parable that is only found in the gospel of Matthew. It is a parable about judgment which is a common theme in Matthew. The theme of judgment would resonate with his Jewish audience or his constituents. The Jewish faith was very clear about who was in gods favor and who was outside Gods favor. They were very clear about who would be outside in the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, and who would be on the inside at the banquet.

The word friend is only used in the gospel of Matthew and it is only used when somebody is in the wrong.

You see the picture given in this parable does not follow through with the open invitation given to the guests in the first parable.

The notion of worthiness , and the idea of wearing the right clothes, the attitude of who is out and who is in was prevalent in the time that Matthew wrote his gospel and it has certainly prevailed throughout history and we cannot deny its existence today. Even in the church which is supposed to be the image of the kingdom of God, it is not hard to find judgment on many things. The clothes we wear, the place we live, the job we do, the car we drive, the color of our skin, and so on and so on and so on.

I am reminded so often of the words of Jesus -judge not and you will not be judged.

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Judgment is not ours to give. Judgment puts us in the position of God and we are not God. We are children of God, invited to Gods banquet. Children who are both bad and good, worthy and sometimes unworthy, sinful yet always forgiven, wounded and yet being made whole, sometimes unlovable yet being loved.

Children invited by god who says come, as you are, to the banquet that I have prepared for you and feast on my grace and my love.

Amen

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