



The Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

November 11, 2012

***Pentecost 24—November 11, 2012***

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Do you have a burning desire to do what is right in the eyes of God? During Halloween weekend, Ellen and I went to a party where many were dressed in costume. We were not, although I was dressed in my priest's collar as I had been out to the hospitals earlier that day. I was asked by the host to say grace and I thought I would have some fun so I said, "Since I am dressed up like a priest, I have been asked to say the grace." After the grace and some delicious eating, a young mom with her baby came up to me and said, "That grace was way too eloquent, you are really a priest aren't you?"

That experience paradoxically points to the fundamental truth though that our outer appearance, our outer nature, is not what makes us who we are; especially in the eyes of God. What matters to God is your striving for authentic Christ-like living. And yes God does call you to be Christ-like, a very high calling indeed, yet one that is worthy of the striving. But what does that mean? Can that be a burning desire of your life, to be more Christ-like?

When Jesus walked up the side of that mountain, two miles west of Capernaum, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, he arrived to tell the world that God had a new plan for His people. On that

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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grassy hillside, Christ introduced a life different than any other imagined if one would only choose to live it. This was the moment that Jesus proclaimed that God desired all of God's people to live in a radically new way—a way that if lived to its fullest was one that later would be called the life of a saint. His Sermon on the Mount turned the known world on its head, as Jesus taught that the standards of the world were not God's. Appearance, money, relationships, laws, judgment, war and peace, it had all changed. A new age was inaugurated, and humanity and the Church has struggled to find its way through it to God ever since.

In his classic work, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Key to Success in Life*, Emmet Fox writes: *The Bible is really a textbook of metaphysics, a manual for the growth of the soul, and it looks at all questions from this point of view. It is impossible to emphasize this point too much. For this reason it takes the broadest view of every subject. It sees all things in their relationship to the human soul, and it uses many common terms in a far wider sense than that given to them by common use. **Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*** (Matthew 5:2) How then are we to understand that being poor in spirit opens up the kingdom of heaven to us? Most of us would not initially consider that to be a good thing—*being poor in spirit*. Might Christ be saying that the only way we can approach his life is when we admit the poverty of our spirit apart from God; that without God we are in fact powerless? And the first beatitude of Christ proclaims that to find God we must first empty ourselves.

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Can you empty yourself like a child of that which keeps you from living in Christ? Macrina Wiederkehr, poet, writes the following in her poem, *The Prayer of the Empty Water Jar*:  
*Jesus, I come into the warmth of your presence knowing that you are the very emptiness of God. I come before you holding the water jar of my life...I came to be filled but I am already full. I am too full. I am full of things that crowd out your healing presence...I am so full there is no room for you...you ask me to reach into my water jar. One by one, Jesus you enable me to lift out the things that are a hindrance to my wholeness...Finally...I sit with my empty water jar, I hear you whisper you have become a space for God, Now there is hope...* When we become a space for God we are on the path to becoming Christ-like.

Today's Gospel from the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Mark is all about what it is to be Christ-like. The words of Jesus can pierce our ears as it did the scribes, but can also massage our hearts into new understanding. Jesus said, ***Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearances say long prayers...Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those others...*** Jesus uses the story of the widow's mite and juxtaposes it against the scribes false holiness to not only get our attention, but as well to point to what it looks like when one has a heart for God. When you have a heart for God you acknowledge your poverty apart from God and invite Jesus to come within.

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Saint Thomas Aquinas once said that *'holiness is nothing else but a resolution made, the heroic act of a soul that surrenders to God.* Let us surrender our souls to God, acknowledging that we are poor in spirit, but knowing that with God all things are possible. As the widow gave God all she had...give Jesus your life. +Amen.

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