

Pentecost 11 (Proper 14)

August 12, 2012

Text: Introit

Theme: "He Opens His Hand"

**One of the differences between the way we understand God as opposed to the way many other people understand God is his attitude toward humans. We do not think of God as "angry." We do not picture him as an angry God just waiting for the opportunity to cast us sinners into the depths of Hell. That image of him was created to scare people. If you're not good, you'll go to Hell! But that is not a Biblical teaching. In fact, Jesus said the opposite when he said in Matt. 9,**

**"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came **not** to call the righteous, but sinners." To teach that God is angry with us for our sin is like saying that a mom is angry with her kids for being hungry for the dinner for which she has worked hours to prepare. Jesus did not suffer and die on the cross so that we could go earn our own forgiveness. In the Bible, we are shown a God who opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing! Look at the Introit with me again.**

**You open | your hand;\***

**you satisfy the desire of every | living thing.**

**Oh, taste and see that the | LORD is good!\***

**Blessèd is the man who takes ref- | uge in him!**

**Oh, fear the LORD, | you his saints,\***

**for those who fear him | have no lack!**

**The young lions suffer want and | hunger;\***

**but those who seek the LORD lack | no good thing.**

**That concept of opening his hand is interesting. I am told that the tradition of shaking hands came about in ancient times to show that no one was holding a weapon, so it was safe to approach. I think of that when I hear this introit. God opens his hand to us. He does not smite us for being bad but rather feeds us and loves us regardless of how we behave.**

**In the Gospel, The people follow Jesus around like a herd of cats because he had fed them bread and fish. My mother used to have a cat that wanted nothing to do with anyone but her and would hiss at you if you looked his direction. That is, until you were cooking bacon and then all of a sudden, there he was, rubbing up against your legs and purring as though he had always loved and adored you. The people were amazed that Jesus could do that cool trick with five loaves and two fish. I don't blame them. It is pretty cool. I would be impressed. But like we so often do, they focused all their attention on the sign and missed the theology that Jesus was teaching with the sign.**

**What Jesus did on that hillside was no more than what God does for every human being every day. He cares for all the children of the world. He sends rain upon the just and the unjust alike. But Jesus has SO MUCH MORE to offer us and wants us to have it.**

**It's kind of sad that the word "stewardship" is so abused and misunderstood. Many people hear that word and immediately think that the church is trying to get their money. The mistake is that if Trinity is just another social agency to you, the word "stewardship" does not even apply to you. Stewardship implies relationship and responsibility. You cannot be a steward of something for which you are not responsible. That is why in the ancient churches, the unbaptized were excused before the offering. It would have been wrong to include them in the management of something that had not been entrusted to them. Stewardship is a family process whereby we decide how to use the gifts that God has given us. A family might sit down and discuss whether they would rather have a remodeled bathroom or a trip to Florida. We are given a certain amount of resources and we manage those resources to the best of ability. Your gifts become my gifts and my gifts become your gifts. And the reality is that they are all God's gifts and stewardship is just his way of spreading all his gifts around. Jesus wants us to have so much more than we take. Because we don't understand stewardship, we tend to limit our giving and so limit our reception as well.**

**He wants us to have the joy of telling the good news of his death and resurrection to children. He wants us to have literally dozens of brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, aunts and**

**uncles. He wants us all to know the joy of feeding the poor and housing the homeless and in so doing leading them to food that leads to eternal life in an eternal dwelling. He wants us to rejoice as his giant family on earth.**

**He wants the people to stop focusing on the bread and fish just like he wanted the woman at the well to quit obsessing about the water in the well and to drink the water of eternal life. All we tend to think about is our particular worldly situation but the truth is that our lives are much, much bigger than the brief years we spend as mortals. Those of you that are over 80, find someone who is young and in the throes of life and tell that person how much you worried and fretted over stupid stuff. Tell that person about all the times you were completely focused on bread and fish and how now you see the miracle God was working in your life while all you could think about was bread and fish. And those of you in the early years of life; listen and learn from that older person so that you don't make the same mistake and worry and fret about nothing. Eat the bread of life! Drink the eternal wine and taste and see that the Lord is good.**

**It is certainly true that during this earthly life, some of us have more physical bread than others do. It is also true that it is our privilege as the children of God to see to it that all people are cared**

**for to the best of our ability, but the focus of our lives is the food we receive at THIS table! Here we receive the bread of life! God opens up his hands and satisfies our every good desire. With the bread of our paychecks, God blesses us temporally but with this bread, God blesses us eternally. He literally opens his hand at this table and reigns down every blessing from heaven upon us as we receive the very body and blood of the one who suffered and died in our place to insure our eternal life in paradise. Stewardship, as it turns out, is just our feeble attempt to find something to do with all those blessings.**