

Jeremiah 2: 4-13  
Heb. 13: 1 – 8, 15-16  
Luke 14: 1, 7 – 14  
15 Pentecost, Proper 17

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### **“Love and Duty; Duty and Love”**

“The time has come,” the Walrus said, “to talk of many things: of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings; and why the sea is boiling hot and whether pigs have wings.” “The time has come,” the Walrus said “to talk of many things.” The time really has come for us but we will not speak of walrus things this day, much as I might like to. I leave that to Lewis Carroll. Today we will speak, in part, of the joys and challenges of being a community of faith, of this sacred and wonderful mystery we call church, of the costs and benefits of change, and of the covenantal relationship with God and each other that is ours by virtue of God’s eternal love as expressed in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus.

Our readings this morning are part of our regular cycle of readings but are remarkably appropriate to my last sermon as your rector. The Gospel reading is a continuation of honor-shame conflicts with Jesus and his religious opponents. This is one is about social hierarchy as expressed in dinner seating arrangements. For most of us, we only think about such things at formal wedding dinners or fancy ceremonial events, but in the ancient age, every social gathering was about confirming or changing one’s social status and, therefore, one’s power and honor in the world. In our world, as in that world, there are still great differences in power, differences in social class, and differences in status across and within many groups. We live in a world in which some have power and wealth and status and preferments while others have little. One of the enduring questions for that ancient world and of our modern world is how to manage justice, fairness, charity, and peace in a world deeply divided by differences in power, wealth, status, and influence. How can we all be one Body in Christ Jesus when we are fixed on preferential seating arrangements and other forms of self-division? What forces exist that can off-set power and privilege? What can we say to those who “lord it over others” and take the better part of everything far beyond their deserving?

In this time of change, of cleaning files, sharing information, of reflection, loss, gain, of the entire panoply of human emotions, I came across the first letter I wrote to you as your newly called rector. It was Trinity Sunday, 2007. In it, I wrote, “The beginning of any new venture is a time of great hope, some anxiety, and personal and corporate joy. All of my senses tell me that the Holy Spirit has guided all of us to this happy outcome and that the time is ripe for new growth in Christ. I know that Saint Barnabas has known more than its fair share of difficulty, loss, and grief over the past years. I, too, have been a bit disappointed and occasionally even frustrated in living into my own ordained ministry. But all that is past us now and the future beckons us to step forward in faith, drawing strength from each other and sharing our gifts openly and joyously. While I cannot know what lies ahead for Saint Barnabas, I can say that I come to you in joy and delight and that I offer all my gifts, my talents, and my time. We will, I know, laugh more than we cry, rejoice more than we grieve, and learn more than we can possibly teach.”

And there is part of my answer to the question of how we, as Christians, might be in a world marked by such grave differences in power, wealth, and status. Laugh more, rejoice more, and learn more.

But there are two more words that truly capture what I believe to be the proper response to the world of power, wealth, and status differences that cause division among us. Two four letter words that one can say in church. Love and duty, duty and love. Those are the antidotes to unbridled power and wealth.

Duty is showing up when you don't want to. Duty is doing the whole job not just the fun parts. Duty is being trustworthy in small things so that you can be trusted with big things. Duty is not eating until everyone else is fed. Duty is paying attention to who is really doing the work and who is just taking credit. Duty shapes and controls power by elevating responsibility over privilege. Duty means leading from the front. Duty means never asking people to do things you won't do. Duty means leaving the campsite better than it was when you found it. Duty means leaving behind water so the next person can prime the pump. Duty understands stewardship. Duty really believes that there will be a tomorrow so we better be prepared for it. But duty alone is not enough.

Love makes doing one's duty enjoyable. When we love, we step out of ourselves and give equal focus to others. Love allows us to pay it forward, to plant vines whose wine we will never drink. Love allows us to touch the future. Love can animate our every act and imbue it with meaning far beyond our time and place. It is love that allows us to laugh, rejoice, and learn in the midst of difficulty, fear, loss, and uncertainty. Love also believes in tomorrow and looks forward to its greater joys and delights. Love wins; love always wins. But it requires that we all do our duty along the way. Power and wealth will never be equally divided in this world but when enough of us do our duty with love, we can all flourish and live as children of God in peace and justice. The choice is ours.

My time of love and duty as your rector now comes to a close. I have endeavored to fulfill the promises I made publicly when we celebrated our mutual ministry together, December 14, 2007. I prayed then to God to, "Make me an instrument of your salvation for the people entrusted to my care, and grant that I may faithfully administer your Holy Sacraments and by my life and teaching set forth your true and living Word. Be always with me in carrying out the duties of my ministry." While I have struggled with accomplishing that, this congregation has been blessed by an unpaid member of the staff who has fulfilled all those pledges and more – and that would be Grace Grant. Her ministry outshines mine and for that, we are all deeply grateful. And, yes, I asked her permission to put her in the sermon.

For me, I know that I have failed some of you, and to those whom I have failed or in any way disappointed or over-looked or misunderstood, I apologize for my errors and ask your forgiveness. But, if, by God's grace and blessing, I have been some help to you, then I rejoice with you and simply remind myself that miracles really do happen. I also acknowledge freely that, throughout my life, I have tried to teach more than I learned. I have failed there miserably because I have always learned more from others than I could ever teach. So, I thank you for

being patient and loving teachers of mine about what it means to be the Body of Christ in this place.

When I applied for this position, trying to be clever and memorable, I wrote a top ten list about me. The last three items were: believes serving others is the highest honor and is its own reward; thinks there is more beauty and joy in the world than people to appreciate it; believes God's grace and blessing is always unmerited and astonishingly abundant. Nothing in these nine years has altered those beliefs.

The mystics have said that when you are shown what to do, you do it with your whole self, you remain until you have done what you were sent to do, and then you walk away with empty hands. There is a new scent in the wind now and I feel the faint presence of your new rector – somewhere out there – waiting to join you all in love and duty. The time has come for us to go and Grace and I will go with empty hands because we try to journey as God desires– trusting in the wonder of the journey itself. But we leave you with overflowing hearts and minds – filled to bursting with a lifetime of memories to warm us and delight us; memories of love and duty shared with laughter and delight in our little corner of God's amazing creation. May love and duty flourish here forever. Vaya con Dios; may God be with you. Amen.