

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
September 2, 2007

Testing...One, Two, Three

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Gospel which was read earlier.

Olive Garden. Outback Steakhouse. Red Lobster. Texas Roadhouse. O'Charley's. These are some of my favorite places to eat. Whether it is by myself, with my wife or family and friends, these are places that I enjoy. When I go there, I'm not looking to be harassed or have my every move scrutinized under a microscope; I'm just looking to enjoy a nice meal. That's what happens when you or I go somewhere to eat: we just eat. There are no strings attached and we're not harassed. However, if your name is Jesus Christ, you're not going to have that luxury.

Our text begins with an innocent setting: Jesus having dinner at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. So far, so good. Nothing seems to be out of the ordinary here. He's ate dinner at many people's houses throughout His days: Matthew, Mary & Martha, Zacchaeus, and others, just to name a few. However, this time, they were watching Him. They did what any doubter would do: they put Jesus to the test. As Jesus has set His face toward Jerusalem, there has been opposition. Now, those watching are watching Jesus carefully, even maliciously, to put Him to the test and to see how He will act. Their intentions are to find something of which to accuse Him. But in the end, Jesus is ultimately testing them and pointing to their own sinful motivations.

We have several key players in the "witch-hunt" of Jesus. We have the ruler of the Pharisees, lawyers and Pharisees. The Pharisees were the good people of their day.

They never missed a religious meeting, they studied the Scriptures, they tithed, and they set the moral standard for their cultures. Jesus did not choose the guests but accepted an invitation to join them. He was likely invited because “*they were watching him.*” They thought He was being tested, but they were the ones who were having their values checked. Lawyers here were more like contemporary Bible scholars than modern attorneys. They interpreted the Scriptures and applied them to social and religious behavior, while Pharisees did not distinguish between the two.

Now that the players are in place, it’s time to set the trap for Jesus. A man appeared before those at dinner who had dropsy. Dropsy is a condition of swelling, called edema today. It is caused by water retention in the body. It was considered grotesque because of the disfigurement it caused. One who had dropsy was considered unclean according to Levitical law.

Just by this man appearing, the food and all present would have been considered unclean. Would Jesus expel the man or allow him to enter? Jesus’ first strike was allowing the man to enter the house. By doing so, all those present knew that Jesus did not abide by Levitical law and customs.

When Jesus asked those present a question, Jesus began the first of His tests: “*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?*” Those watching Jesus are asking themselves the same question, and they have given no answer, only silence. Previously in Luke, when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, criticism came: “*There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.*” The men saw the need of this man; they saw his illness, they saw his pain, they saw someone with a problem – but that is all they saw. They didn’t see someone they loved. They

didn't see someone for whom they cared for or would sacrifice for. Because of this, they saw no reason to help the man.

Jesus goes straight to the heart of the matter: you're not going to help the man because he's not important to you. If it were your son or your ox, you would see no problem because it's someone who is important to you; it's someone you love. Jesus brings it to them on a level which they can understand. Now that it is someone they're connected to, will you sit and watch and do nothing, claiming that it's the Sabbath? Instead of answering Jesus, by acknowledging that what Jesus said is right, they continue to sit and say nothing.

For Jesus, this man with dropsy was someone important to Him. It was someone who Jesus loved. He must act immediately – there is no waiting until the Sabbath is over. Jesus heals the man and sends him away healed. Jesus doesn't wait; He doesn't delay; He acts because He loves the man.

We are no different than the man with dropsy. We have a need of healing. Sin has infected us and is running rampant in God's creation, a creation that was once good. Jesus sees us and acts. He does not delay in healing us. He does delay in restoring us. He does not delay in forgiving us. He does not put off our needs, our pain, or our problems until a later date. This is because Jesus acts out of love on our behalf. He willingly gave His perfect life for our imperfect life. He made a sacrifice which we could not make. He died so that we would live.

The second test which Jesus gives is one which the guests have started for themselves, though they didn't realize it. The test was in the form of how they seated themselves at the table.

Jesus observes them as they seat themselves, each trying to get the seat of highest honor. They look at what they have done: their accomplishments, their actions, and their work, and they see a great deal to love and a great deal of accomplishment. They love themselves and show that by how they sit.

When you love yourself, you don't see other people as people. The Pharisees don't see others; they simply see themselves in relation to others and their standing. Loving themselves and wanting to show it off by where they sit, they one again do not look at others in love. They don't see others as people to love, but either as those they surpass or those they strive to surpass. They are objects, not people.

Jesus' instructions to the guests are about humility. One should never recline at the first couch at the table, lest the host shame the aggressive guest by placing him in the last place. Rather, recline at the last place so that the host may elevate you to a spot of honor. Their own lack of love does not simply involve a demotion; rather, it is a complete humiliation. They are removed to the lowest place – a place where there is indeed shame, because they have loved themselves and have not shown love to others.

The proper way is not to love yourself, but to love others and put others before yourself. In this way, there can be no embarrassment or humiliation. This is the life of sacrifice that Jesus leads. Jesus looks at others with love and sacrifices Himself for them. That is what Jesus is all about; sacrificing Himself for us because of His love for us.

The final test which Jesus gives is directed to the host of the dinner. However, the host is not really interested in hearing Jesus and listening to His words. He invites Jesus expecting that Jesus will do something for him. Simply having Jesus there adds prestige to the host's event. Even more, if Jesus did something "wrong" at the dinner, this would

only make the hosts' standing go up in the eyes of Jesus' enemies. The host is acting in such a way as to show love for himself, using others for himself.

Again, Jesus shows true love in that He expects no reward, no return, no reciprocation with His love for us. His love asks nothing and expects nothing; He loves purely and simply to help others. The help He offers us is the love of God that led Him to send His Son for our salvation. This is the love of God from which we will never be separated. In this love, we see the gracious salvation that is indeed ours now. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now the peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus until life everlasting, amen.