

Trinity 2 Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

“This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.”

In my first Parish, I prepared a rather poor couple for their marriage. They had been living together for many years and already had four children. There was alcohol, abuse and poverty in their recent and distant past, and they were struggling to come out of that darkness, and to find healing and a new beginning.

They started attending Sunday afternoon services at our very small St. Andrew's Church. Their children were baptized, and finally the wedding day came. All went well. There was a very small congregation, but the service, their vows and God's blessing obviously meant a lot to them. But then we headed to the Fire Hall for the Wedding Banquet. There were about 100

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places set in the Hall with rolls, cold meats and salads. It would have cost this poor family \$500 plus the Hall Rental, which is a decent chunk of change for a family of six on welfare, and more than half the chairs were empty. Half of the invited guests had not bothered to come. Despite the invitation and effort of the hosts, they didn't come.

I recall that wedding banquet every time I hear Jesus' parable, for it helps me to understand the hurt and anger of the host, as Jesus describes it.

Now in another parable of our Lord, the servants which are sent out to pass on the invitation are treated dreadfully by the intended guests. They were beaten and even killed. But in this parable, the invited guests are much more Anglican, polite about their lack of religious fervour. Why, they even pass on their

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excuses! Remember the powerful words in the Exhortation, “But such excuses are not so easily accepted before God.” They send their regrets. And it appears that regret will be their portion.

In that parable, the banquet is the marriage supper of the Lamb, in heaven. The invited are first of all God’s people, and then all the world, especially the outcast, the poor and despised, and Jesus Christ is the one sent to extend the invitation. Now all three fellows had good and legitimate excuses. Work and farming are God-given, noble and necessary, and who is going to criticize the man who is dedicated to his wife? But when these things take the place of this first call, the primary invitation of God, they cannot bear the weight we put on them.

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I delight to imagine what might have happened to these three. The first fellow, I think, may have fallen into a hole in his new field and died. The second, well, maybe he was trampled by his new oxen. And the third, well let's imagine that his new wife got rid of him in some equally surprising way. My point is, that when work or recreation or even family takes the place of God in our life, things are amiss, and we shall miss the banquet of heaven. More than that, when we seek to satisfy the thirst in us, which God alone can quench, in any other thing or person, they shall horribly disappoint us. We look to get from them what God alone can give.

In the end, the banquet hall of heaven is filled, but not with the guests originally invited. Rather, it is filled with the humble, meek and despised of the world. The parable may have been spoken at first to Israel, in its spiritual pride, but it continues

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now as a warning to us in the Church. We know the invitation, we have heard the invitation, we have received the invitation...but have we replied?

Together, the message of these readings today, is that there is no excuse for not responding to God's love. The love of God in Jesus Christ demands a response from us, and there is no excuse. God listens for the echo of his love poured out to come back from our heart. St. John tells us that without this love we are as good as dead, just as St. Paul says that without this love we are nothing and it's all worthless. This is all put here, in today's reading, in the strongest possible terms. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Now there are different kinds of murder and different kinds of murderers here. (Stop thinking about your neighbour, this word is for you, don't let your conscience grow deaf.) There is first and second degree murder,

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hatred which is acted out and even planned. And there is manslaughter, hatred which just spills out of our filthy hearts at times. So remember that our Lord Jesus himself taught that murder included not only killing someone, but being angry with anyone, calling someone a fool or a twit or any insult whatsoever. Who under that law can claim not to be a murderer? Whose heart or lips are clean here? Not one, no not one.

Just as this hatred or anger in our hearts is death, and the assurance that we are headed for death, so love in our hearts, and in deed and in truth, is the assurance that we are in, and headed for, eternal life. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. See how St. John so faithfully passes on the teaching of our Lord. He said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one

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another.” Our love for one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow disciples of Christ, is both a sign to the world and an assurance to us, of our salvation and of God’s work in us.

For in this Christian fellowship, we proclaim that while blood may be thicker than water, love is thicker and stronger than blood. If we love each other, it is by God’s grace and influence. In this Christian love, we prefer one another’s company, we defend each other, we forgive each other, we overlook each other’s weaknesses, and we learn from each other’s strengths.

So on the one hand, we have this anger and hatred and murder, and its end is death. On the other hand, we have this love and its end is life. But how can we get from our anger, bitterness, envy, grudges, hurt, and hatred, to this love which God demands and commands?

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By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. It is by believing in Jesus Christ, who died for us, that we know and receive the love of God. Jesus' life and death is something to be believed, but it is also the great invitation, and that demands a reply: Come. Love invites us to love. We must first know his love, receive his love, be filled with his love, learn from him how to be loved, that we may then love in return and reply and response. But the love of God in Jesus Christ demands our answer, and there will be no excusing anyone.

This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another. That faith, is the gift of God the Holy Spirit, and that love is the work of God the Holy Spirit in us. How shall we believe, and how shall we love? By the Spirit which he has given us. Let us pray, then, that God would renew us in the gift of himself, his Spirit, and

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fill our hearts, our homes, our lives and this fellowship with his
love through Jesus Christ. Amen.