

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

Turn in the account of your stewardship. The unrighteous steward was terrified by the news that the books were going to be opened, and that he was going to be audited. And so should we be. Turn in the account of your stewardship. This image of steward is meant to remind us that we are caretakers, not owners, of all that God has entrusted to us. That includes our lives, our allotted time, our bodies and minds, our health and strength, our talents and abilities, as well as our money, education, and opportunities. And beyond these things of which we are personal stewards, there are those gifts for which we are commonly responsible - all of God's good creation, the earth and all its creatures, the whole human family, our own family and friends, and of course, supremely and above all else, those spiritual mercies which are ours in Jesus, and the means of grace entrusted to us.

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

When the Master says, “Turn in the account of your stewardship,” he is saying, “What have you done with what you have been given?” That is how God will judge us and our lives. What have you done with what you have been given?

Jesus tells us a story this morning, where the hero is a lazy liar and a cheat. What possible example could be found in this fellow? Just this one thing. He was prudent. He was shrewd. He saw the writing on the wall, and he took practical and prudent steps to prepare. Just as he was so prudent in preparing for his earthly future, Jesus suggests we should take such drastic and shrewd action in preparing for eternity. The steward gave away his Master’s goods and so was sure to have a welcome in the homes of those people when the end came. Jesus suggests that just that kind of generosity, giving away our Master’s goods, will guarantee that we will be received into eternal habitations.

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

Jesus uses this same term - shrewd or prudent - literally “thoughtful,” in another passage. I always feel as if I’ve got it backwards: I’m as innocent as a serpent and wise as a dove. But Jesus says, “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” Well, what is this wisdom, this shrewdness and prudence that he praises? It is to recognize that what we think and do matters.

Two things can deceive us: presumption and despair.

Presumption says, “What I think and do doesn’t matter, because I’m one of God’s chosen.” Against such presumption we are warned, “Let any one who thinks that he stands take heed, lest he fall.” The story of Israel in the wilderness is one example, and warning us are countless other, old and new stories, of tragic failures and falls among God’s people.

Despair says, “What I think and do can never matter, because I’m one of God’s cursed.” Against such despair we are encouraged:

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, and will also provide a way out, a way of redemption.”

The unrighteous steward neither presumed nor despaired, but wisely and prudently thought and acted.

Now today, the particular story and warning before us, is that of the fall of Israel in the wilderness. I am always a little uncomfortable with that reading at this time of year. Paul seems to be describing my summer vacation! “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance!” What Paul is condemning, though, is not eating or drinking or dancing, but the lust for these things, the unbridled way in which Israel and we give ourselves over to them. It was this evil or inordinate desire, what we call “lust,” which was their destruction. Like Esau in the Old Testament, and like the Prodigal Son in the New, they forfeited their inheritance and their special relationship with their father, for immediate gratification. In

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

the Parable of the Sower, this is described as the cares of the world, and the delight in riches. And the lusts of other things enter in, and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

The need to curb and control, and to deny and forsake our lusts, is part of the Gospel message. Titus 2.11 says, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

What we think and do matters, which means, in part, giving up wrong thinking and wrong doing. But also, as we pray today by God’s help, it means to think and do what is right, right thinking and right doing. In the Epistle, Paul would have us think correctly about

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

the Eucharist and behave accordingly. We are stewards of all God's gifts, and especially of this chief means of grace.

The cup is a communion, a participation, in the blood of Christ.

The bread is a communion, a participation, in the body of Christ.

We become one bread and one body through that one bread, Jesus

Christ. As later in the same letter Paul warns us about discerning the

Lord's body, so here he would have us recognize the body and blood

of Christ available, powerfully present in the Communion, but also

present in those who receive that together.

The Holy Communion is an effectual sign of our belonging to

Jesus Christ, so much so that he lives in us and we in him, and that

in him, we belong to one another. The Communion means:

1. We belong to Jesus Christ.
2. We belong with one another.

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

This is what Paul would have us think. But he would also have us do, and not fail to live out, the truth of our salvation. The Communion in Christ's body and blood, which we enjoy, calls us to Purity and Unity. We are washed and sealed in the blood of Christ, forgiven and owned, and we are called to live out this Purity. And we are united in him, the one true and living bread. We are his one body, and we are called to live out this Unity. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Purity and Unity in Christ, one body washed in his blood. It is the means whereby this healing and reconciliation is given, and the means of strength, whereby we can continue in that God-given, Christ-won and Spirit-infused purity and unity. Let us pray and seek for purity and unity for ourselves, for our congregation, for our Anglican Communion, and for the entire Church, that we may be pure and one, the Holy Catholic Church.

Amen.

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

If the layreader wishes, the following may be added to the sermon:

The Bread which we break and the Cup which we bless.

In today's Epistle, Saint Paul reminds us that the cup is a communion, a participation, in the blood of Christ. The bread is a communion, a participation, in the body of Christ. And we become one bread and one body through that one bread, Jesus Christ.

The issue for Christians can never be whether the presence or power of Jesus Christ is available, to be apprehended and received, in the Lord's Supper, but how exactly that real presence of Christ is defined. Christ is really, truly and powerfully present, but in understanding how this is true, Christians may honestly disagree and hold divergent theories.

Anglicans emphasize the spiritual manner of the Communion, and that faith is the necessary means whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten. We have also, in common with other Reformed

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

Churches, re-claimed the liturgical and sacramental end of the Eucharist, which is to eat and drink, to receive Christ in and by the Sacrament. The end is that Christ may dwell in us and we in him, and we must not confuse the means with the end. So Richard Hooker wrote, “The real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament.” This is not Receptionism, but rather a true and biblical emphasis on the end, which is that we might receive Christ’s body and blood. Communion in Christ is the end, the purpose of the Sacrament.

It is to Queen Elizabeth that a helpful rhyme is attributed, that may not settle all, but settles what is most important about the Holy Communion. Here is the rhyme:

He was the Word that spake it

He took the bread and brake it

Trinity IX Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

And what that Word did make it

I do believe and take it. Amen.