

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 3, 2005

Come Unto Me

Psalm 51, selected verses

Matthew 11:25-30

Yesterday afternoon I had the pleasure of assisting in the marriage service of Dan Hack and Brooke Gigliotte.

It was a beautiful day and a joyous celebration.

Dan, for those of you who are newer to Glenshaw,
is a child of this church, baptized and confirmed here,
and we enjoy his tenor voice in the choir on Sunday mornings.

Brooke is a very devout Catholic,
and the priest who officiated the service was a long-time friend
of the Gigliotte family.

Father Bill was a gracious host and was very generous
(by Catholic liturgical standards) in allowing me to participate
to the extent that I did.

I led the Responsorial Psalm,
gave the Prayer of the Faithful,
and even got away with adding a few words,
so that in addition to praying for the Pope and the bishop,
we also prayed for all elders and deacons of the church.

And I was permitted to give a wedding sermon
standing directly in front of the altar, instead of behind the lectern.
It was a delightful time.

I am a little embarrassed to admit,
as an ecumenically minded Presbyterian,
that this was the first time I have ever attended a Catholic Eucharist;
which also means, it was the first time in my adult life
that I have been intentionally excluded
from sharing in the supper prepared for us by our Lord.

Thankfully, during the service itself,
I was concentrating so hard on keeping up with things,
the standing, sitting, bowing, kneeling, and so forth,
that I was too distracted to be really bothered by
the actual moment of exclusion.

I was also consoled by Father Bill's graciousness
in inviting all Protestants present to come forward,
to signify that we were not Catholic by crossing our hearts,
and to receive a priestly blessing instead of the sacrament;

Later at the reception, I had the opportunity to talk with Father Bill
and really enjoyed the conversation.
We talked about changes in the worship in both of our traditions;
we both lamented the broken unity of the church from which
we both suffered;
and we agreed that if it was up to us,
we would allow for the open sharing of our common meal,
and we still hold out hope that the day may come.
He was pleased to hear that Presbyterians
were celebrating the sacrament more frequently these days.
He asked if he thought we'd ever move to accept
a doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ,
meaning that the bread and wine change into Jesus' actual body.
I assured him that we *do* hold to a doctrine of "real presence"
but real in a spiritual and relational way,
since we aren't much concerned with the metaphysical explanation
of what happens to the elements.

So it's been an interesting weekend.
I have found myself very thankful that we will be celebrating
the Lord's Supper in worship this morning.
And I've been pondering the question
What makes us worthy to come to the table of the Lord?

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In our reading from Matthew, Jesus offers an invitation:
*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.*
This, it seems, is a generous invitation.
When Jesus refers to "heavy burdens" in Matthew,
he does so in a section where we are given a whole list of people
who aren't really getting the point God is trying to make to them:
starting with John the Baptist, who has begun to question
Jesus' identity,
then those who try to get Jesus to play their religious game
and who reject him when he refuses,
then the unrepentant cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida,
then those who are wise and intelligent
either by the world's standards
or the standards of the established religious authorities,
scholars and sages "who could explain much,
but missed the revelation in their midst"
So, when Matthew places Jesus' invitation to the "heavily burdened"
in this context,
he probably intends us to think about

the trappings of human religion which become a barrier
to communion with God,
and heavy weight, holding down our spirits
which long to rise into holy fellowship with God.

Jesus wants nothing to do with the human requirements
we impose on his free gift of grace.

There is no human requirement, no creed or doctrine,
no metaphysical explanation of "real presence,"
no moral behavior, no political platform, no social policy,
no form of liturgy or church government,
which can make us worthy
to enter into communion with God.

Jesus says,

*All things have been handed over to me by my Father;
and no one knows the Son except the Father,
and no one knows the Father except the Son
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

We are made worthy to approach God by one thing alone:
the invitation of the Son of God.
Christ's invitation makes us worthy.

That, however, might still leave open the possibility of being excluded.
How do we know the Son has chosen us?

The gospel of Matthew anticipates our question,
and it's after this business about the Son choosing,
that Jesus extends his open invitation:

*Come unto me ALL YOU
(or in good Southern tongue, "All Y'all")
...ALL YOU who are weary and heavily burdened...*

Strange, isn't it, that the thing which makes us worthy to come to the table,
is that we are tired?

Spiritually tired, emotionally tired, mentally tired, even physically tired.
Tired out by life.

Tired out by trying to live up to every standard and expectation
laid upon us.

Tired out by the burden of never being quite good enough.

Tired out by the knowledge that we are constantly letting God down,
letting others down, letting ourselves down.

The thing that makes us worthy to come to the table
is the feeling that we are not worthy.

As it is written in the Psalms

*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise.*

Come unto me, says the Lord.

Come to the table of the Lord...

not because you are wise and intelligent,
but because you are like an infant.

Come...

not because you think you are good enough
but because you want God to make you good.

Come...

not because you have never sinned
but because you feel your sin deeply and want to be set free.

Come...

not because you understand and can explain the revelation of God,
but because you are amazed, struck with child-like wonder,
at the mystery of the real presence of Christ Jesus.

Come...

not because your faith is strong and unwavering,
but because you are weak and need to find new strength.

Come...

not because you are proud of your religious heritage
or your moral victories
but because you are contrite in heart, aware of your failure,
and can do nothing but throw yourself upon God's mercy.

Come, learn from the one who is gentle and humble in heart.

His yoke is easy. His burden is light.

and you will find rest for your souls.

Amen.

ⁱ M. Eugene Boring, *The New Interpreters Bible*, VIII, p. 275