



# St. John's Episcopal Church

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"To know Christ and make Him known"

## Sermons for the Journey

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In today's story from the book of Exodus, God's people got impatient when Moses went up to the mountain. The people built a calf of gold to worship and turned from the laws and ways of their Lord. It is hard to imagine anything that the Israelites could have done that was as contrary to the God's commandments as worshipping other gods. I wonder what God was thinking about God's people when they worshiped that calf of gold. It comes as no surprise that we are still worshipping other gods. I wonder what God thinks of those of us who sin today like Harvey Weinstein. Weinstein is accused of groping, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and the rape of dozens of women for decades. Allegations that he threatened to end the careers of women who spoke out, that he paid hush money, and that he made donations to the police that might have curbed investigations, make his sins hard to comprehend. The shooting of hundreds of people in Las Vegas that left 59 dead and 489 wounded is also sin that is hard to comprehend. The fact that the head of state in North Korea has nuclear capabilities and that he is trying to provoke the world into catastrophic engagement is also hard to comprehend.

Billionaires have been able to make several key changes in our economy. The Drug Industry for example has received favorable legislation from politicians like Billy Tauzin who was heavily supported during his election and became the president of PHARMA, a giant lobby for the drug industry. The opioid and fentanyl crisis in our nation has spiraled out of control because people are making millions of dollars on these drugs. Lobbies and special interest groups have a huge effect on our government because they have so much money behind them and politicians need money to get reelected. Corporate CEO's who used to earn 25 times as much as an average worker, now make over 200 times the average wage in their company. The relative tax burdens for

extremely wealthy people and big corporations have and will continue to diminish, putting more of the tax burden on the middle class. Can you feel the anxiety that these individuals have caused? I sure feel it.

The golden calf in our society is the need for excessive money, fame and power.

Instead of using their blessings to be a blessing to others, many use their money, fame and power for personal gratification. But God has something else in store for us. Moses gave us the 10 commandments. Jesus gave us the two greatest commandments to love God and to love one another. In the Episcopal Church, we ask you to rationally think about scripture, profess your faith, and live your life as best you can. Those who have money, fame and power such as Weinstein have gotten away with sexual misconduct for decades leaving a trail of brokenness and shame in their wake. This week my Facebook page was flooded with woman who replied, "Me too" to acknowledge the extent of our sexual misconduct problem. As a church, we have to speak up against sin. We should not and cannot tolerate sins such as sexism, racism, homophobia, bullying, and economic greed. We cannot let the bullies like Kim Jung-un, sexists like Harvey Weinstein, racists, and people like the Las Vegas shooter deter our convictions.

In Today's Gospel, Jesus tells another parable about the kingdom of heaven. In the parable, the king sends his slaves to invite a group of insiders to a wedding feast. The insiders today could be the rich, famous, and powerful who have become arrogant. This arrogance allows them to be self-centered and to believe that their actions are justified.

I once walked into the office of the GM at Saks Inc. He started cursing and yelling at me for missing a divisional meeting. Instead of letting him know that I was on a call with the CEO, I calmly told him that his language was unprofessional and that the way he treated women was disgraceful. He reminded that the last person that criticized him was fired during the meeting and told me if I said one more word, he would fire me on the spot. I said that I shared my perspective for his sake, not mine. If he ever wanted to be a CEO, he needed to clean up his act a little. Taking young assistants to lunch, getting drunk with them, and then having them model for him in his office was just not professional. He said, "Get the F-word out of my office." Two months later he was let go for sexual misconduct allegations.

In today's story the insiders do not show up to the wedding feast. Insiders can often see the splinter in some one else's eye, but not the log in their own eye. The Pharisees lived by the law, but used the law to raise themselves higher than others. Insiders use their fame, money, and power for selfish purposes. This allegorical reference of the wedding

feast is the Kingdom of God. Jesus is telling the disciples that there will be a price to pay for arrogance. I believe that we will all have to answer to for our sins.

A coach once told me that if we are silent when people are sexist, racist, or violent, we are complicit in their sin. Power, fame, and money can influence our ability to speak up. That is how the Weinsteins in the world get away with it for so long. The king then invites all sorts of people to the banquet, and the wedding hall is filled with outsiders. These are just regular folks like you and I. But, Jesus is telling the disciples that getting to the Kingdom of God takes more than just showing up. The king notices that one guest is not wearing a wedding robe and throws him out into the darkness. At first we find this disturbing. When the billionaires get what is coming to them, we are fine with that. But God calls each of us to a higher standard. Most of us would agree that Harvey Weinstein is a pig, but how many other men have not always treated women with the respect that they deserve as children of God? How many white folks refuse to accept the notion that minorities in this country are not treated equally? How many of us spend money easily on ourselves, but are not generous to others with our blessings?

Today's Gospel invites all of us to the heavenly banquet, but warns us to be wearing a wedding robe. A white robe represents our intention to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord, respect, and follow him by changing the way we live our lives. We do this not for the church, but for our souls. Jesus offers forgiveness to all those who turn from sin. John Wesley said that all are called to glory, but we have a claim to glory only through the righteousness of Christ. Only through our faith in his redeeming grace, can we be saved from sin, made holy, and find everlasting life. We know that we are invited to the banquet, but how do we put on this wedding robe so that we will be holy in God's sight at the heavenly banquet? We begin with the understanding that we were formed in the image of God's love and given the whole world into our care. Unfortunately, throughout our history we have turned from God and each other. Sex, money, and power can lead to arrogance and they can blind us from the path of God.

The Good News of the Gospel is that God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life. God has forever shown his unconditional love for us, and we are invited to attend the heavenly banquet by following the path to holiness that Jesus has shown us. We walk in newness of life through the love of God, through the redeeming grace of Jesus, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. We were created to become the image of God's love which was shown to us through Christ.

When we get our inner self in line with the path of Christ, we are dressed in a white robe to a new life in Christ through his life, death and resurrection. This month we are reading "The Seven Storey Mountain" by Thomas Merton. In his autobiography Merton tells us how he got his inner self in line. Please know that we all need a little work on our soul because our culture is pulling us in the opposite direction. All are invited to the Kingdom of God. Rich and poor, male and female, black and white, outsiders and insiders are all invited to the heavenly banquet. I ask you to consider joining the wedding feast, making sure to put on your white robe.

This week, Paul tells us to let our gentleness be known to everyone.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:4-7). Amen.