



Pastor Gwen's Message
11th Sunday after Pentecost
"Climbing the Wrong Mountain"
Sunday August 8, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

What reminds you of home? For me it was the food my mom used to make. Certain aromas and tastes bring back memories of my childhood. No peek chicken, bacon spaghetti, boiled dinner and of course pork roast with sour kraut. I could always tell what was on the menu for supper, when I walked in the door from school. I think most of us can relate to those good old days when a family meal was the highlight in the home.

I read a story this week told by Linda Fang at the Smithsonian Gallery in Washington D.C. many decades ago.

AT THE FOOT OF A GREAT MOUNTAIN IN CHINA LIVED A FATHER AND HIS THREE SONS. THEY WERE A SIMPLE AND LOVING FAMILY.

THE FATHER NOTICED THAT TRAVELERS CAME FROM AFAR EAGER TO CLIMB THE DANGEROUS MOUNTAIN. BUT NOT ONE OF THEM EVER RETURNED!

THE THREE SONS HEARD STORIES ABOUT THE MOUNTAIN, HOW IT WAS MADE ALL OF GOLD AND SILVER AT THE TOP. DESPITE THEIR FATHER'S WARNINGS, THEY COULD NOT RESIST VENTURING UP THE MOUNTAIN.

ALONG THE WAY, UNDER A TREE, SAT A BEGGAR, BUT THE SONS DID NOT SPEAK TO HIM OR GIVE HIM ANYTHING. THEY IGNORED HIM.

ONE BY ONE, THE SONS DISAPPEARED UP THE MOUNTAIN, THE FIRST TO A HOUSE OF RICH FOOD, THE SECOND TO A HOUSE OF FINE WINE, THE THIRD TO A HOUSE OF GAMBLING. EACH BECAME A SLAVE TO HIS DESIRE AND FORGOT HIS HOME. MEANWHILE, THEIR FATHER BECAME HEARTSICK. HE MISSED THEM TERRIBLY. "DANGER ASIDE", HE SAID, "I MUST FIND MY SONS."

ONCE HE SCALED THE MOUNTAIN, THE FATHER FOUND THAT INDEED THE ROCKS WERE GOLD, THE STREAMS SILVER. BUT HE HARDLY NOTICED. HE ONLY WANTED TO REACH HIS SONS, TO HELP THEM REMEMBER THE LIFE OF LOVE THEY ONCE KNEW. ON THE WAY DOWN, HAVING FAILED TO FIND THEM, THE FATHER NOTICED THE BEGGAR UNDER THE TREE AND ASKED FOR HIS ADVICE.

"THE MOUNTAIN WILL GIVE YOUR SONS BACK," SAID THE BEGGAR, "ONLY IF YOU BRING SOMETHING FROM HOME TO CAUSE THEM TO REMEMBER THE LOVE OF THEIR FAMILY."

THE FATHER RACED HOME, BROUGHT BACK A BOWL FULL OF RICE AND GAVE THE BEGGAR SOME AS A THANK YOU FOR HIS WISDOM. HE THEN FOUND HIS SONS, ONE AT A TIME, AND CAREFULLY PLACE A GRAIN OF RICE ON THE TONGUE OF EACH OF THEM. AT THAT MOMENT, THE SONS RECOGNIZED THEIR FOOLHARDINESS. THEIR REAL LIFE WAS NOW APPARENT TO THEM. THEY RETURNED HOME WITH THEIR FATHER, AND AS ONE LOVING FAMILY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

This morning we are gathered here at Christ the Servant Lutheran Church to not only worship our Lord and Savior but to receive a taste of bread and wine, Jesus who is our bread of life. The bread of our life that is a special gift from God with a welcome into his kingdom, our true home.

I know that I need this reminder of heaven because I am very much like those sons in the story. We grow up, leave home and try to climb our own mountain. We look for meaning in life in all the wrong places. And for many of us it takes a long, long time to find our way home. I pray every day that my son and daughter will come down from their mountain, taste the rice and let Jesus find them again.

So, what is this mountain that we have climbed? Our story mentions a few mountains that people often climb. Mountains where houses of rich food, the houses of fine wine and the houses of gambling await the innocent seeker. But don't be fooled these are not the only homes or dangers that our society presents today. You can certainly add sex, physical beauty and wealth to that list. All these as vices have their own temptations for folks today.

But you ask, what is so bad about these things. Well, they become bad when we worship them for their own sake, when we give them more of our time and energy than we do God's kingdom. Food by itself is one of our needs as shown in Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs. You cannot go far in life without nourishment, it is true, but when we begin living to eat instead of eating to live, it can become a problem. Drinking alcohol irresponsibly can be another issue, along with using illegal drugs. Our culture too often has a need to drink or take drugs to feel good about life, rather than facing our problems. I remember years ago; our council made an effort to talk to the leaders in Park Falls as to what were the major issues or problems. We were trying to see what was needed and how maybe our church could help and serve the community. The overwhelming answer was drug addiction. Caught in a culture of drug abuse, people are many times unable to get the help that can set them free from this demon.

Gambling is another trap that people can fall into in our society. How many times have we heard on the nightly news that we need to go out and get our lottery tickets because the jackpot is up to a record high? Our location in the Northwoods also gives us easy access to several casino. While I don't think

playing sheepshead for nickels is damaging to our life, there are probably many who spend too much time and money trying get rich schemes.

Sexual misconduct is also rampant in our society. Now I am not a prude by any means, but how our movies, TV shows portray this gift that God has given us is portrayed in outrageous ways. Easy to get caught up in that lifestyle I suppose. Or how about how our society objectifies beauty of the body. Yes, God gave us these amazing bodies to enjoy life in, but to go to the point of anorexia or bulimia to be thin enough to be accepted is not what God intended for us. Also, as I mentioned wealth can be another place of discontentment for those who cannot achieve it or those who look at their money as their god.

What I am trying to say is that all these things will not satisfy us in our quest to be loved and at peace. They only get in the way of our enjoyment of the kingdom our Lord has given us. Abundant life here on earth that our heavenly father has secured for us by sending his only son to die a horrible death on a cross and then rise again to overcome death. Forgiveness is the free gift, most gracious free gift, along with the promise of an abundant and then an eternal life in heaven with Him. This is God's plan and although we may go up the wrong mountain seeking other homes, we should not ignore it.

In fact, I am really glad you are here this morning to rediscover the sacrament of the eucharist. This meal instituted by God is His invitation to return home, to come once again into His kingdom. As we eat the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, we are refreshed. God is truly present in, with and under the bread and wine. And our true home is where our God is and folks, He is right here this morning.

And let us never forget the joy of being home. **AMEN**