

Sirach 27:4-7

Psalm 92

I Corinthians 15:54-58

Luke 6:39-45

Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek

March 3, 2019

I want to begin this morning by telling you a few things about my father. He was a product of the depression, a veteran of World War II, a hard-working farmer, and a respected leader in his community. He never bragged about his accomplishments nor did anything flashy. He had little tolerance for showing off. His favorite color was brown. From time to time, if he felt particularly daring, he might venture to green, but he was far more comfortable with brown. I learned very early in my life not to test his aversion to arrogance. Whenever he sensed me acting a little too big for my britches, as he called it, he would put me back in my place immediately with a well-placed look, a few choice words, or if it fit the circumstances, a challenging and humbling chore. I am telling you this because the parables that we just heard in today's Gospel remind me of my father. Unlike Jesus, he never spoke in parables, but the lessons that these parables convey could easily have been his. With these parables, Jesus is teaching his disciples, and us as well, to avoid hypocrisy and to embrace humility in our lives. The command to remove the wooden beam from my eye before I try to remove a splinter from the eye of my brother is a reminder for me to examine my own behavior and deal with my own faults before endeavoring to correct others. Many of us need that reminder. It is awfully tempting and far too easy for us to overlook or try to justify our own shortcomings as we criticize others. Continuing to teach, Jesus then turns to another parable, this one about a tree and

its fruit – “A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit.” Likewise, he adds, a good person produces good and an evil person produces evil. With this parable, Jesus is teaching that our true character, whether good or evil, is revealed by our consistent words and deeds, and not by show.

Jesus spoke these parables in his Sermon on the Plain, which is Luke's account of the narrative better-known to many of us as the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. Other than the physical settings, there are only subtle differences between these two narratives. In both, Jesus is teaching his closest followers about discipleship while ministering to a much larger crowd that had gathered from near and far to hear him and to be cured of their afflictions. Both sermons begin with beatitudes, or blessings, and continue with various teachings about human behaviors, providing us a roadmap for following Jesus.

Two weeks ago, in our Gospel reading, we heard the opening verses of the Sermon on the Plain and Luke's version of the Beatitudes, where Jesus declares as blessed the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the hated who all hunger for God's mercy. But woe, he adds, to those who are so comfortable that they do not recognize their need for God. Last week, the Gospel continued further into the Sermon on the Plain with Jesus teaching us to love our enemies and commanding that we turn the other cheek, lend without expecting repayment, and stop judging others. And today, we approach the conclusion of the Sermon on the Plain with parables and lessons condemning hypocrisy and inspiring humility. A parable that we have not heard in these three Gospel readings is the one that concludes both the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount – the

Parable of the Two Foundations. In this parable, Jesus says everyone who listens to his words and acts on them is like a wise man who built his house on a rock foundation. The floods came and the winds blew but the house stood because it had been well-built. But those who listen and do not act are like the fool who built his house on sand. The floods came and the winds blew, and the house collapsed and was destroyed.

In our formative years, most of us studied the Ten Commandments at length, even memorized them. The commandments helped us discern right from wrong as we grew and matured into adults. But as the rich young man in Scripture learned, following Jesus involves much more than just keeping the commandments. To show us the way to follow him, Jesus gave us the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount. I wish we put as much emphasis as adults on learning the Beatitudes and other teachings of these two sermons as we did on learning the Ten Commandments as children. And not just learning these lessons but learning to act on them as well. That is the solid foundation, Jesus teaches, upon which we should build our lives.