

SERMON 801

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

October 13, 2013

915th Week as Priest

741st Week at St Dunstan's

6th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

THE LITTLE HOUSE

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In every society, in every time in history, there has always been a segment of that society that has been considered “untouchable.” In India’s caste system, the lowest people on the socio-economic scale are the untouchables, people who belong to a pariah caste from birth, and who are considered impure, defiled, and doomed.

In **2009**, the Indian film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, won best motion picture for the rags-to-riches story of an untouchable who wins a million dollars on a game show. It was pure fantasy, but the film focused on India’s present day realities.

Under Jewish Law, devout people were not allowed to speak to, associate with, or eat with people outside their own race, tribe, or socio-economic level. The Book of Leviticus prohibited men from marrying a divorced woman, and priests were never to touch a dead person.

In First Century Palestine, Jesus of Nazareth was scandalized for talking with a Syro-Phoenician woman at a public well. He was ridiculed for eating with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. And he was held in contempt by the Scribes and Pharisees for healing on the Sabbath, not washing his hands in the stylized rituals of the day, and befriending Samaritans and other outcasts from decent society.

Worst of all, we learn that Jesus of Nazareth healed a group of lepers who called out to him for mercy and grace. They were afflicted with the worst disease of the day, and were completely isolated from the rest of society. They were homeless, destitute, and lived on what they could beg or find to eat. The lepers called out to our Lord from the prescribed distance of fifty steps, and he cured them—by their faith and his words, by the power of God, he healed them, and told them to go and present themselves to a priest at the Temple.

It was unheard of, to care for these untouchables. Everyone assumed that they deserved their walking death sentence, for they all knew that God favored his chosen people, those who followed the Law; and he condemned those who were outside the Law, and those who defied and defiled the Law. They deserved to be homeless, poor, and completely helpless. It was the direct result of their fathers' sins, and they deserved no dignity, no kindness, not an ounce of mercy.

In our own day and time, we have people who are likewise judged and condemned for their poverty, their physical and mental illness, their lack of initiative, and their ignorance. They are ridiculed for receiving food stamps, or unemployment compensation. They are held in contempt for driving beat-up old cars, or getting their medical treatment at the Emergency Room, or using WIC vouchers to buy

food and milk for their children. Some folks consider them all to be criminals, or at least liars and cheats. **But not you.**

No, you, the people of the **Episcopal Church of the Epiphany**, welcome them to come among you. You reach out your hands to help them, and they receive **Rice & Beans**, canned goods, boxed groceries, and more. God's grace precedes and follows you, because you are given to works of mercy. I am astounded at your kindness. I am very pleased and proud to work among you. I am humbled by your generosity to the poor, and your kindness to the stranger, and your care for the hungry and thirsty, the aged and infirmed, the children, the homeless, the diseased and helpless.

You are the hands and feet of Jesus of Nazareth. You are the willing hearts and minds that surround people with love and hope. You are a Sacrament—an outward and visible sign of God's inward and spiritual grace—and nothing less.

And, most of all, you are largely unaware of the goodness and mercy that you show to the least among us, to those most in need. You do not judge; you give. You do not condemn; you help. You do not belittle; you encourage. The **Little House** may seem like an eyesore to some, and we may wish it didn't block the view of our beautiful church building from the highway. **But the truth is that the Little House is Our Father's House.** The **Little House** is a place of ministry, outreach, help and hope. It is my firm belief and conviction that our Lord Jesus Christ is no prouder or more grateful for our finest cathedral, our most beautiful church garden, or our most exquisite holy place—than he is for The **Little House**.

You simply amaze me with your love for God and your neighbor.
Amen.