1 September 2019 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 12 Vienna, VA

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"Dead Men Don't Care"
Text: Luke 14:1-14; Hebrews 13:1-17

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

He just wants to have a nice dinner party, this Pharisee. At least, that's the appearance. But there's an elephant in that room. The Pharisees, we are told, ***were watching him carefully***. And they had been for some time. They wanted to trick Him, trap Him, or tempt Him; get Jesus to say or do *something* so they could discredit Him, strip Him of His followers, and get rid of Him - put this Jesus problem to bed once and for all.

But they couldn't. How many times had they already tried? Got to give them credit for not giving up. But they had a problem. A giant miscalculation they didn't understand about Jesus. They kept thinking Jesus was like them, and so they kept setting traps and tricks and temptations that would work on them. So they were flummoxed when they didn't work on Jesus. They were smart. They were among the best and the brightest and most educated in Israel! Surely they could come up with something . . .

So what was it that they didn't get? What was their giant miscalculation? You're probably thinking that it's that Jesus is not just a man but the very Son of God in human flesh. And while that's true, that's <u>not</u> Jesus' edge here. For though He was the Son of God, He did not use His power and wisdom as God for Himself. For others, yes. But the Scriptures say He was like us in every way, except without sin. And so it's not that Jesus had these secret super-God powers that kept frustrating the Pharisees. It's rather this: **Dead men don't care**.

And Jesus knew He was a dead man. He kept telling His disciples that He was going to be crucified. In Luke chapter 9 (v. 51) He *sets His face to go to Jerusalem* - to die. He knows this must happen. Just as He is fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies about the blind receiving their sight, and the deaf hearing, and the lame walking, so too must He fulfill those other prophecies that speak of His suffering and death. That He will be *pierced for our transgressions* and *crushed for our iniquities* (Isaiah 53:5). This is why He came. And this is what would happen. Every Word of God will be fulfilled.

And so Jesus doesn't care about what the Pharisees care about. He doesn't care about His social standing. He doesn't care about wealth. He doesn't care about being invited to the banquet at the next Pharisees' house next Sabbath and what seat He'll get then. He doesn't care. **Dead men don't care** about such things.

What He cares about . . . is <u>them</u>. That's why somewhere between the soup and salad courses and the entree, He focuses attention on this man with dropsy and whether it is proper to heal Him on the Sabbath or not. Surely if he was one of their children they would help him. Or even just one of their *animals* they would help him. Even on a Sabbath. So why shouldn't Jesus help him? Interrupting a perfectly respectable dinner party to talk about a man with some gross disease is one way to make sure you don't get invited back. But **dead men don't care**. And more important to Jesus is to teach about mercy than to make sure He gets His belly filled next week.

And then He goes on to criticize the guests because when the announcement had been made, "Dinner is served," He had gotten more than one elbow to the ribs from those rushing to get the seats on honor. Who does He think He is? Be gracious, not critical, Jesus. But **dead men don't care**. And more important to Jesus than proper etiquette and social standing is to teach about humility.

And then finally, one last dig, one last chide before dessert is served: *I see that you only invited those who are of advantage to you; those in the dinner party rotation; those who can pay you back. Why don't you invite those who can't? The poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. They're the ones who need it, who need your generosity and care. And though they cannot pay you back now,* ***you will be repaid in the resurrection of the just****.* And pay attention to that last line and the reference *to the resurrection*. In other words, **they're dead men too**. For only the dead are resurrected. So these things they care about, all these things . . . aren't going to make much difference when they're dead. *So why do you care about them now?*

By the way, that last question wasn't just for the Pharisees - but for you, too. Why do <u>you</u> care about these things?

Well I think the answer is that we find our lives in these things and we're trying to save our lives. We want to be well thought of, not forgotten or brushed aside. Maybe we don't have to be rich, but at least we want to be comfortable. We do want to be recognized by others. We want to move up in the world, not down.

But like Jesus, you're a dead man. With each passing day, you're one day closer to your death. And while we don't like to think about that, it does change your thinking and your priorities. The fancy house, the big vacation, your social standing, next year's invitation to the banquet of the year, none of that matters so much when you hear the news that you have cancer, or some other life-threatening disease. Neither does that squabble you have with your neighbor, or the revenge you've plotted, or how you're going to even the score. **Dead men don't care**. It is the ultimate freedom. Freedom from the worries, cares, concerns, anxieties, and competition of this world. From all these things that all they do is divide us from one another and separate us from God. These things that are all about me. What's good for me. What I want.

But **dead men don't care**. My father doesn't care that all his earthly belongings are in boxes in my house. He doesn't care who the president is and who's going to win the Democratic primary. He doesn't care what people think about him. He doesn't care who's going to win the Super Bowl this year, or if he's going to be invited to the big Christmas party. He is now with Jesus and that's all that matters. What he before knew by faith he now knows by sight. And nothing else matters. **Dead men don't care**.

But, you say, I'm not dead yet and so I must care about these things! Well, Jesus wasn't dead yet either, but He knew His Scriptures, and that they must be fulfilled. That every Word of God must be fulfilled. So haven't you heard: *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life* (Romans 6:3-4).

So you are a dead man! Because you've been baptized. Oh, yes, you still have your physical death to go through, but that death has been transformed by your baptism. Or perhaps better to say, transformed by Christ and His death and resurrection given to you in baptism. So that it is now simply the pathway from life to life. From this world to the next. From faith to sight. Because of your baptism, you have a part ***in the resurrection of the just***, for baptism has made you just. Your debt, your faults, your every sin has been forgiven, washed away. By water, by the blood of Jesus, by the Word of God, all applied to you there. You are joined to Christ, and so live with Him now and will live with Him forever.

That's what the Word of God says, and it will be fulfilled. And so you, now, like Jesus, get to *walk in newness of life*. Which is not putting you back under the Law, telling you *be new*! But rather, telling you that you no longer have to care. Because **dead men don't care**. And you have died with Christ and been raised with Christ. Christ is your life, not the things of this world. And so your stuff, the size of your house and bank account, your social standing . . . **dead men don't care**. Because you have what's greater and more lasting. You have what death cannot take away. Your life in Christ.

And that's the ultimate freedom. The freedom to enjoy the things of this world and life, the things of this creation - as Jesus did - but not to find your life and value in them; not have them rule you and so control what you do or say or how you live. And you have the freedom not only to enjoy these things, but to use them for others, to help them and serve those in need. **Because you're a dead man** - you don't need them. And what you need, Christ will provide. And honor? What worldly honor could surpass the honor you have already received in being made a child of God? So while you may never get your name on a Man or Woman of the Year plaque, a sports trophy, or a Medal of Honor, you have something even better - your name is written in the Book of Life. The guest list for the heavenly wedding feast that has no end.

Therefore, ***the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind*** who have been invited to the feast? That's you. And the humble, the lowly, who have been exalted to a higher place? You again. And those who have exalted themselves will have to give way.

So ***dead men don't care*** because they don't have to care! No one is more free than a dead man. And since you are free, you can say as we heard in the reading from Hebrews today, ***confidently: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"***

So you can love, even those no one else does. You can show hospitality to strangers. You can vote but not despair if the outcome is not as you wished. You can keep the Word of God and speak its truth even in the face of mocking and persecution from the world. You can share and give what you have. And what else? What else are you hanging onto that you won't need when you're dead? Then why are you holding onto it? **Dead men don't care**. They are free. And you are free.

This morning when we began the Divine Service, you repented of not living a dead man's life and died a little death again. Good! And then you received the forgiveness of all your sin; a resurrection to a new life already here and now. And you've heard the Word of God and all that Jesus has done for you and provided for you and gives to you. And now you come to the foretaste of the feast that awaits you - the feast for those who have been crucified and risen with Christ. His Body and Blood to keep and preserve you steadfast until He calls you from life to life, from this world to the next, from faith to sight.

But it's all yours, now. And when you live that way, the world might look at you and regard you as the Pharisees did Jesus - they'll think you're like them and so won't be able to figure you out. Why don't you care about what they care about? Why are you so free? And you can tell them: because **dead men don't care**! I live in Christ.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.