

St. John's Episcopal Church, Tappahannock, VA
Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost
October 12, 2008

*“Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might
save us.”*

The Rev. William T. Pickering

I. “Jesus Saves” – that once pervasive bit of graffiti that has brought any number of bad jokes – Like “Jesus Saves – Green Stamps (Does that show my age or what?) Yet this phrase is the core and the center of our Christian faith about the nature of the life and ministry of Jesus. Today the more appropriate joke might be – “Jesus Saves – Where?”

A. The whole idea of God’s incredible action of salvation through Jesus is at the heart of the Gospel message and one that has brought repentant sinners to their knees for over 2000 years – and yet our culture has a rather incredible ongoing ability to wonder just what Jesus really saves us from.

1. The lesson from Isaiah this morning talks about God saving his people and expresses a long time message of the prophets. Following the time of David, the people of Israel have been confronted with poor leadership, powerful neighbors and rather ugly occupations of their land by their enemies.

2. The need for salvation was fairly clear – even into Jesus’ time. The Roman occupation of Israel with Herod as a puppet king and Pilate – a Roman and gentile as governor – was not a good time.

3. When people dreamed that Jesus was the Messiah, the core of their hope was that he would save them – save them from the oppressive occupation by Rome, and set them free to be their own nation again, and to become a great nation as they dreamed they were in the time of David.

4. Jesus was quite a disappointment because he didn’t do that.

B. Jesus also was quite critical of the religious leaders of his time, and their political aspirations. They had missed the point of their religion and were using it pretty much for their own benefit – and they could have done so much more!

1. He told numerous parables about the Lord God moving on from the people of Israel and choosing a new people.

2. Last week we heard the parable of the vineyard and the owner who would turn the vineyard over to new tenants who would respond properly and give the Lord

God the due God deserves.

3. This week, the King invites his special friends to a wedding banquet for his son and they quite rudely do not come – so he has his servants gather new wedding guests for the party.

C. We take some joy in these stories, because it is obvious that the new tenants and the new wedding guests are us. Jesus has called a new people through Baptism and the Holy Spirit and that is the core of our salvation as a new people of God.

1. But salvation seems to be a tough concept for us. The American ethos has always revolved around our ability and responsibility to pull ourselves up by our boot straps, and to be self made people who work hard and earn the good things that we have in this great country – and that whole mindset has helped to make us great.

2. Salvation has most always been related to the more aesthetic and esoteric concepts of the need to be redeemed from the wages of sin and for many from

the stain of original sin.

3. Salvation is from those things which we ought to have done that we have not – and those things which we ought not to have done that we have done.

4. It has become more and more difficult to make that theological point as we have moved to a culture of high self-esteem, where we are all valued for the good that is in us, and the original sin stuff is very much lost in that.

5. We are also learning new things about what might be the real cause of bad behavior and are able to lay the responsibility on our inappropriate upbringing, or our basic cultural situation. Individual responsibility has become difficult to define – and generally politically incorrect to assign. It is an age of entitlement.

II. So what does Jesus save us from?

A. Well it may be that we have come to a place where God's salvation is looking to be more necessary. We have allowed our bad behavior and lack of paying attention to lead us to a place where we are in desperate need of salvation.

1. The appalling collapse of the financial markets, not just here and on Wall

Street, but all over the world should be getting our attention – a lot!

2. The collapse is linked to credit errors in the housing markets, to lack of oversight for financial institutions, for the increasing price of energy, our procrastination in trying to find alternate sources, and to an economy that is based almost solely on paper, and not on goods and services.

3. In fact, it can be said that we are quite responsible for this mess – all of us.

We have allowed our leaders to do things that they should not, and to leave things undone that they very much should have done.

4. We have allowed issues of accountability and responsibility to slip away and some executives of companies presently being bailed out by tax dollars are still enjoying some incredibly expensive perks – on us. AIG Retreat?

C. It is time to repent. It is time to remember that Jesus Saves and take a long look at the priorities and the responsibilities that Jesus found so essential.

1. Our neighbors, friends, parishioners and lots of people we don't know at all are going to be in a lot of pain – some of us will be in a lot of pain.

2. Life styles will be severely threatened, long planned hopes for the future will need to be adjusted and we will need to help each other.

3. Loving our neighbors as ourselves is going to be an important part of our salvation. Loving God will be an important part of loving our neighbors.

4. Doing to others as we would hope might be done to us will take on a new and concrete meaning.

D. We are far from the end of the world, but we are in a place where salvation is pretty clear again. We need to be saved from ourselves. We need to be saved from out of control priorities. We need to be saved from run away greed and selfishness.

1. It is possible that there are new tenants waiting in the wings for the vineyard. It is possible that new guests are being invited to the wedding banquet as we are too occupied to accept the invitation. It is time to pay attention.

2. This St. John's Church needs to be a place where folks pay attention. Where hurting folks find some comfort in the fellowship, in the worship, in the love and

the support, and in what ever we can do to help.

3. I want to be a guest at the banquet – don't you? Jesus Saves!

Amen.