2nd Sunday after Trinity
Bessemer - 1958

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IN NOMINE JESU

St Luke 14: 18 They all with one consent began to make excuses.

EXCUSES

Any person who is honest with himself will see immediately the proneness of his nature to invent excuses. It is the universal characteristic of fallen man. Ever since the day that Adam tried to shift from himself the blame for what he had done, and Mother Eve in her turn sought to pass off the crime which could not be denied, their offspring have become masters in the evil art of framing apologies. Beginning with sin, it is a disposition that will evidence itself as long as there is sin. Examples of it are plentiful throughout the Scriptures. One is given us in the parable for today.

A wealthy man is represented as having made preparations for a splendid feast. No means had been spared to make it just as sumptuous and lavish as possible. The tables were weighted down with the choicest and most inviting food; and servants, according to the custom of those days, had gone out to summon the guests. Come, they said in gracious, well-meant, cordial invitation, come, for all things are now ready. The response? We hear it in the parable. The one had bought a field; one had purchased five yoke of oxen; still another had married a wife.

They gave answers, to be sure, but not reasons; just clumsy, hollow excuses. There is a wide distinction between the two: reasons and excuses. Men make excuses; but they do not make reasons. Reasons shape themselves. Excuses are feigned, pretended, whereas a reason rests on reality. The truth of the matter is that these invited guests did not care to come to the supper, and so they were not at a loss to discover some plea not to go. But it is plainer than plain that their difficulties are all trumped up, not honest or real.

In its application the parable will teach us that it is thus that many act who are invited to the spiritual feast which the great and loving God has furnished and spread for us men in His banqueting hall, the Church. If we were to send out this morning messengers, our elders and ushers, our Sunday School teachers and young people, to visit the various homes in our community with God's

great invitation of saving love; yes, and even to call upon our own tardy member who are rarely seen in God's house, what reception, do you think, they would mee Without a doubt they would be buried with an avalanche of excuses.

Perhaps the most common plea, heard from all sides, time and again, in unending monotony, against acceptance of Heaven's kind invitation to the spiritu banquet and membership in Christ's Church is the inconsistency of the church members. Constantly the objection is raised: Why, what's the use of making a pre fession of being a Christian and uniting with the Church? Church members are no better than other people. Again and again we are confronted with statements lik these: I find more kindness and truthfulness and honor among worldly people than I do among so-called Christians. In other words, they are repelled from the church because those who hold connection with it have so little real Christianit about them. And who is going to dispute the truth of it? What is the reason wh so few pay any attention to Christianity? They see so little in it. There is s little in the lives of church members to commend their faith. Take the average church member, and where do you usually find him on the Lord's Day? In the Lord sanctuary, worshipping the God whom he professes? And can the most casual on-looker detect a perceptible difference between him and the man who is not a chur member? In his tone and temper and manner, his habits and his speech? Not that he is free from sin and vice, but does he bear the positive marks of the true Christian? Does he show the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, lon suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance - those fruits to which the apostle refers in today's Epistle when he says: He that loveth not his brother abideth in death?

Don't you think that more men would be attracted to our churches if ou membership would be more consistent, if they saw more of genuine good example in the worship of God, more of a consecrated life in upholding God's law and honor our speech and habits, more of a radiant spirituality in our hearts? If they se us just as selfish and quarrelsome, jealous and unkind, wrathful and contemptuou

as unconcerned of higher and nobler things as they themselves are, worldly and trivial, where is the drawing power? What the average professed church member needs is more sanctification of life, more holiness of living. Let everyone, is the apostle's urgent and solemn warning, that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness. A tremendous responsibility rests upon every Christian in this respect.

And yet, to deal with the difficulty itself, the question to ask anyon who professes to hold aloof from the church because of the unworthy life of chur members is: Are you acting honestly in pleading this as a reason? You certainly do not reason this way all the time. You never refuse to take money because som can be found which is counterfeit. You do not refuse your children an education because some schools are deficient and some educated people turn out to be no-good. You do not refuse to be married because some have proven failures in that holy estate. Then why refuse connection with the divine institution of God's Church because some members are faulty? You do not judge an apple tree by the decayed, worm-eaten specimens that lie at its bottom, but by the good ones that hang on its branches. Why then judge the church by some deficient specimens of Christianity and not by those men and women of whom you are bound to admit are honorable and upright, seeking to live a holy godly life? The inconsistencies that you see in so-called Christians are not there because they are Christians, b just because to that degree they are not Christians.

Considerations about other people ought not in any way effect our personal relation to Christ. Christianity is first and foremost in its essence the relation of the individual and Christ. It is between the two. No third person can intervene in that relation. The call to become a Christian, a church member is a personal one. Christ says to me individually, Follow Me. Come to My spiritual banquet. That others disobey that call is beyond the point. The question to be settled is what you will do. So this plea about other people wil not do. It is not a reason but a contemptible excuse.

There is another type of excuse which we might term intellectual. Peo find difficulties about points of Christian doctrine. There are things they cannot understand, and the inference is that, unless they can, they will not joi the church. Now it cannot be denied that anyone who thinks will find difficulti The more thoughtful a man is, the more acutely he will feel the force of the difficulties. Now it must be remembered that God has given us a revelation of Himself in His Word, the holy Bible. That precious and infallible Book tells us of things of which we have definite information nowhere else. But while the Bib enlightens us in respect to many things, it does not clear up all our questions and satisfy our minds in respect to all problems.

Take the question: Where does sin come from? and Why did an all-wise G ever permit it? And to this we answer, we do not know! It is an insolvable mystery. But then, we are not asked to solve it; neither are we responsible for the solution. The fact is that sin is here, and it was here when we arrived in this world, and we are tainted with it. How it came, that is none of our affair. One thing, however, is sure: God is not the cause or origin of it. But the point of interest to us is how we may rid ourselves of its defilement. And certainly a this point we must confess that the great and good God in His unspeakable mercy has provided a glorious remedy - the atoning cross of Christ, our Redeemer. What folly it would be for us to turn away from the remedy which He has provided until we have found out the origin of the disease!

What would you think of a man who was half-starving and who was brought in and given a seat at a table that was loaded with all kinds of sumptuous food. And as he looks over that table, he sees many dishes that he thoroughly understands and which he would greatly enjoy, and he knows that they are perfectly wholesome. But he sees two or three dishes that he has never seen before and does not understand them. And though he is half starved, he refuses to eat of th dishes that he does understand until someone explains to him the mysteries of the the dishes that are new and strange to him. What would you think of a man like that? By the same token let us be careful that we do not pass up the banquet o

God's redeeming love simply because there are some things we don't understand.

Another excuse which many give when urged to follow Christ and unite with His Church is that they feel they are not good enough. I wonder how anyone with the New Testament in his hands can think he is not good enough. Did Jesus not welcome those whom everybody else despised? Did they not say of Him, This Man receiveth sinners? And what sinners they were - open, notorious, vile, disgraceful sinners! Go through the list: Matthew, the publican; Zacchaeus, the chief publican; the woman, the dying thief! Think of it - the swindler, the harlot, the dying robber Christ received with open arms. And there are many stories in the New Testament to emphasize and underline that great Gospel senten Whosoever will may come. Again, Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. We come to Christ not because we are good, but just because we are not good. There is just one place in this wide world for people who are not good enough, and that is the Cross of Christ uplifted on Calvary.

There is then no real reason that should be a hindrance to Church membership. On the contrary, it ought to be regarded as a privilege and an honor. What an excellent provision was set before those guests! - Everything that was choice adorned the festival table. Likewise, what excellent provisions God has provided here in His Word and Church for the soul: pardon of sin, peace of conscience, His divine favor, access to the throne of grace, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the certain hope of eternal life. These are only some of the blessings which crown the Gospel Table. It is simply impossible to mention all the good effects which result from a right and wholesome connection with the Church, and where God meets and deals with His people as nowhere else.

Let us all then make the firm resolve - the Holy Spirit helping us - to become ever more closely connected with Christ and His Church and to cease from vain and idle excuses until God's invitation shall reach us to come and sit down at the blessed feast on high. Amen.