

**Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost,  
October 20, 2019**

**Solemn Evensong & Benediction**

**By the Reverend Dr. James Conlin Pace, Assistant**

*Year 1, Proper 24: Ecclesiasticus 4:1–10; Luke 10:1–20\*; Luke 13:18–22*

A couple of months ago, Brothers Damian and Thomas and I suggested to Fr. Jay that we devote some of the adult education calendar to issues concerning those who live on the street. The events of any given day inside this church, immediately outside the church on its steps and sidewalks, the streets surrounding, all give expert testimony to the fact that we are in the center of many people's unsheltered lives. Fr. Jay immediately agreed and carved out a very generous four weeks for programming. The four of us then met one afternoon after Evening Prayer, and we went to work.

We settled on a number of topics and their sequencing. After some initial change in the order of topics, we agreed to the structure of week one: an introduction to the human side of those who live on the streets which would appropriately lead to discussions of physical and social needs. Week two was devoted to their medical complications and how these impact one's psychosocial and spiritual needs.

Week three dealt with the theology of caring for our brothers and sisters and Jesus' call to minister to those in need. We took time to examine how the praxis of theology was demonstrated in the work of Florence Nightingale and St. Martin de Porres. Week four, next week, will be devoted to a discussion of how other congregations have responded to their call to serve; what we are doing now, what we hope to do, what might we do, and what could be our next steps.

Embracing the immensity of these human needs is not easy. I am challenged by the three weeks thus far. The latest figures suggest that there are upwards of 93,000 people in New York City who live on its streets. The awareness that the city as a whole is not structured to meet such high demands for such wide-ranging services. Issues of housing, mental health, chronic illness, hygiene, and safety take many resources and call for a host of ministries that need to be offered and then closely monitored by those who truly care about ministries of service.

And then tonight's readings. The first is from the book of Ecclesiasticus. Also called the Wisdom of Sirach, or simply Sirach or Ben Sira, it is a book of ethical teachings. The book is the largest wisdom book

from antiquity to have survived and is found in our Apocrypha.

The ethical teachings provided tonight are very appropriate to what we have discussed in the adult education classes the past three weeks. They detail the responsibilities of **those who have** to **those who do not**. The haves and the have nots. The beginning of the reading introduces us to 10 separate things **not** to do to those who have little. These are then followed by a list of 9 things we should do as people who have. The concluding line states that if we do these things, we will be like a beloved offspring to the Most High and that the Most High will love each of us even more than do our mothers!

And the recommendations or calls to action, if you will, are indeed the very acts of ministry recommended by our various speakers. Provide various and sundry acts of kindness. Generosity. Respect. Care for others. Do not turn your face away from the poor. Do not keep needy eyes waiting. Bow your head to the person in front of you. Incline your ear to one who is in need. Be like a father to an orphan. Answer someone who is in need with kind and gentle words.

The second reading tonight recounts the sending of the 70 two by two into every place where Jesus was about to visit. Lambs in the midst of wolves. Nothing to weigh one down so that the one who bears Jesus can go out, armed with his teachings, enlightening all to the Kingdom of God in their midst, and say: “Peace to this house.” And here is something that I have never quite thought of before in this way. Having shelter does not necessarily mean that God’s peace resides therein or that the Kingdom is being shared from the overflowing graces. A shelter does not guarantee the Kingdom within. But if God’s peace is a part of the lives of those who live therein, there is the Kingdom. And that Kingdom is then to be shared. If the house does not receive you, one ends up in the streets bereft of the Kingdom that was right in front of one’s eyes. He who rejects Jesus rejects Him who sent Him. He who shares in God’s peace has their name written in heaven.

What might we take away from these experiences? Well. First. We can acknowledge how much of the Kingdom we have and share here. We open our doors. We extend hands of welcome. Offer greetings of peace, listening ears. We gather resources that we share, we reach for help when it is needed. We are also

open to what it is we might be able to do going forward. We are proud of what has been done, but we are also driven forward by God's peace that forever guides us. There are disparities and great divides. And so we cannot sit still and be content. We have baptismal vows to continually live into; we have the Kingdom of God to share with others. We pray God's help and direction in our ministries together to do just that.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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