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"Cornelius, Peter, and the Hapsburgs (or Status and the End of Life)"
The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman (05/05/2024, The Sixth Sunday of Easter)

Let us pray

Almighty God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and

Our Redeemer

Amen

There is an Episcopal priest in New York City

Named Janet up there in the diocese of New York and she has a little brother and in the 1980s that little brother

played Ferris Bueller in a hit movie called Ferris Bueller's Day off and Matthew Broderick has a scene in the middle of that film

Where he's decided to cut class for the day because it's such a beautiful day and he finds himself in downtown Chicago

Trying to eat at a very fancy restaurant the kind of place where if you show up without a jacket the

Matrady would come up to you and say perhaps you'll feel more comfortable in this or and they make you wear this blazer

It's the white tablecloth. It's the silver. It's all of it and they clearly don't have a registration

Ferris Cameron and Sloan and so there they are looking like the high school students

They are trying to get a seat at this restaurant and while the Matrady has turned his head Ferris looks at his little

Reservation book and sees that there is someone who has a reservation for a party of three and so when the Matrady returns

He says, I'm Abe Froman and I'm here reservation party of three and the Matrady looks at him and says

You're Abe Froman. Yes, I am the sausage king of Chicago

There's a brief pause

But Ferris goes for it says yes. Yes, I am and we'd like to be seated, please

Now this to me illustrates something that I feel like many people are doing in life

Which is to say we want access to a certain situation. We don't have access

So we pretend to be something we're not in this game of status that we all play

I don't know if you've noticed this but certain levels of status or position

Gratin you access

To places to opportunities if you have these sorts of things

So for example when I wear a clerical collar to make a hospital visit

I can just have free room of the place people just think I know what I'm doing and know where I'm going and it's totally fine

I have stolen lots of medical supplies

And nobody asks any questions if you need any gauze, please let me know

Now you may not be pretending to be the sausage king of Chicago

But you may be using status and status that maybe is not quite yours to gain access to certain situations

The common thing I've seen people do and I too I must confess have done this thing where to maintain a certain level of status in a conversation somebody will mention something and you pretend that you've heard of it

You they just I just read this article in the Atlantic by so and so oh yeah, great article

Yeah, you know you have no idea what they're talking about

But you would be low to admit that you were of lower status in any way

When people say they just want on vacation at someplace you are clearly not cool enough to know about

We just got back from Dalmatia of Buffy and me was great on the yacht They're like oh, I guess they're dog lovers. I don't know what that means

It's on the Adriatic for those of you wondering

We like to keep our status we like to look like we have it together

This is why people pretend to know what they're doing as a parent as a spouse as a friend as an employee as a productive member of society

Because higher status

Having it all together means you have value as a person

You're worth something so why we put our diplomas on the wall

It's why we drive certain cars or live in certain neighborhoods. We want people to know who we are and what we've done

We also like people to know that we believe the right things and vote the right way and think the right things and have the right

Theological commitments and all those things are things that contribute to our status is who we are

And this is among all kinds of people all kinds of political religious class

Affiliations everybody is sort of jockeying for status

I've seen this come up. I was talking to somebody who was a current college student at a northeastern university that is seen as a so-called liberal

University and I was asking this person about their experience there and what it was like and

You know how diverse is it and you know it has this reputation as being very progressive

But surely there are diverse viewpoints represented and have you met any conservatives there or people that would be more moderate and this person said

Well, yes, but when I meet them I choose not to be friends with them Status

Who's in and who's out and it's in the other way too?

I mean there are people who have so-called conservative beliefs that would never send their child to a certain kind of school

God forbid something happened to them and so

You know our our children are going through have been going through the college application process and they're sometimes when they're asked

Where are you applying and they'll name these schools and?

Sometimes people will then hear the places to which they're applying and pull them aside and give them a strong lecture about how to

Avoid the temptation of Marxist and Leninist ideology that will surely come their way should they go that was

Funnier in my head than you guys felt but so I don't know if this is working for you, but certainly

We fear you know and we have we have our group and you have to believe and think the right things

To gain a certain level of status to be in the group. This is just me outlining. I think something that wherever you land on any of these questions

Issues and categories you've probably been aware of the games that people play about status

Position and value and what makes you so that you are in and what makes it so that you are out

Because when status becomes all-important two things happen you pretend to have whatever it is to get you in

And you get very concerned about who's in and who's out you start gatekeeping

This is why religious denominations start we're gonna be the in the pure group

But then they start dividing because then the original pure people are not as pure as these other pure people and they split this happens with political parties

Right are you a Republican or a rhino?

You know are you a are you a Democrat or are you a progressive far left like everything begins to split into smaller

And smaller categories because people are worried about purity and sex I just like to begin with very non-controversial things usually when I if you're new at St. Albums. I just keep it really mellow

Also, I told them to turn off the air conditioning because I wanted to make it just that extra

You know

Now you can blame the lightning strikes. We're on it. We'll fix it.

But God bless you

Suffering produces character as St. Paul said so

My whole point is

This status stuff and I want to talk about acts and I'll talk about funerals

And I want to talk about the Habsburgs

So acts chapter 10 has something to say about this issue of status and gatekeeping and who's in and who's out

I have to do a little

Soporific background on what is going on here in acts because it begins sort of in the middle of the story
Sort of a meanwhile in Gotham city, so we have to do the episode recap and I'll talk to you about acts 10
Yes, thank you and
And
Yeah, and then we'll talk about the Holy Roman Empire
So we in acts 10 or it picking up in the middle
St. Peter Jesus's right hand man that first
Kind of
Leader of the disciples the one who was the
Ready fire aim kind of person he has now found himself in leadership in this early church this Christian community
After Jesus's resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit and these people all around Jesus these were Jewish people following their Jewish Messiah
Thinking they were reforming their Jewish community
They have been working in that community
But they begin to do what God always wanted them to do which was to go into the other communities that surrounded them
And that started to happen and Peter is praying before what we read today is praying in a city called Japa on the Coast of the Mediterranean and he gets a vision and then after the vision is over somebody comes to him and says you need to go
See this guy some messengers have shown up and said you got to go to his house and his name is Cornelius and he's a Gentile
And so let's go and Peter says okay, so they go. It's a couple days journey and they get to
Caesarea Maritime another beautiful seaside resort and you could go there today and see all the ruins of Herod's palace
And it's swimming pool and they go there and they're welcomed into Cornelius's house
Peter and his other
Disciples of Jesus Christ and there they are in this Gentile house now I don't know if you've ever gone into somebody's house and immediately felt kind of icky
You know, maybe you don't like the art they've chosen on their walls. Maybe you don't like the smell of the house or the shag carpet
You know, maybe you're not a fan of their backsplash or whatever is going on
Take that and multiply it by a thousand and you have sort of what Jewish people might have felt like going into a Gentile home
Because these are very different folks not just different religious traditions
But the religious traditions of the Gentiles were horrifying to Jewish people who wanted to keep the law
You know no graven images no idols and if you've seen have you seen gladiator
When Russell Crowe had a much lower BMI he played a gladiator in ancient Rome and I love you for that

And he had you'd often seen pull out of his pocket this little bag
open the bag and pull out these little
Happy meal prizes. They were these little figures and they were little
idols of
From the Roman pantheon these deities and they were very important to
him
They represented his ancestors and these other gods and so Cornelius
as a Gentile would have had those things in his house
Most like it says he's a god fear so he was kind of on the path
Interested in this god of Israel, but the whole household
Unlikely there were some people that had some of those images some of
those statues and they wouldn't have
Necessarily kept all the dietary restrictions and followed all the
rules and so for Peter and the disciples to walk into this house
It's a little
They go in
And Cornelius
asks Peter to do would always happens just clergy when we're people's
house
They say would you please preach a sermon? We don't get enough on
Sunday
It's not long enough. We want more preaching. So Peter starts
preaching
He starts tell them about Jesus Christ and his death and his
resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit and the invitation to
receive Christ
And it says and this is where we picked up our passage today in Acts
chapter 10 while Peter was still speaking
And we read in verse 44 the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the
word
They start speaking in tongues
Someone finds a tambourine. They're all worshipping. It's a great time
And the response we read in verse 45 of who are called the circumcised
believers meaning all the Jewish
Christ followers that are with Peter they see what's happening
And it says they are they are astounded
In the original Greek it says they clutched their pearls, but the
translation here is they were astound they could not believe it
and it says
the Holy Spirit has been poured out
Quote even on the Gentiles
Peter says can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people
who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have
We have kept the rules we received the Holy Spirit. They didn't keep
the rules
They received the Holy Spirit
So let's baptize them and so Peter commands that they get water and
they're all baptized
I wonder who for you are the people
whom if God showed grace mercy forgiveness acceptance to them

You would be astounded
Even on the fill in the blank
Go ahead name some names just kidding. They didn't do it at the 9
o'clock either
But you know there's people
There's the people who deserve it and then the people
You know you have a bone to pick with those folks
Not sure if they deserve the grace of God
But as Peter says
These folks have received the Holy Spirit just as we have and who can
prevent them from being baptized now
I don't like this is you know. I'm with you. You know
I want people who are in and people who are out
But it seems to be in the way God works in the world
The rule keepers and the rule breakers the ones we think are in the
ones that we think are out apparently all of them need Jesus
And Jesus
gives himself to all of them
I have been thinking a lot about what it really means to be human
lately and what this business of church is actually about why we're
here
The music is beautiful. The stained glass is breathtaking. The people
are great. But why are we here?
And I've been thinking a lot about death
Because for whatever reason at St. Olvins in this particular season in
the first quarter of this year
We have done 13 burials or committal services
and
This has made me more aware even in this Easter season of this Lenten
idea of the brevity
And fragility of life and we are here to talk about this thing the
diplomas on your wall the stuff in your resume the clubs
You belong to what you believe politically what you believe in terms
of denominational politics
All these things that we think define our status and matter a great
deal
I'm not saying they don't matter at all
But I'm saying that at the end of your life they basically amount to a
hill of beans
And what really matters is what God has done for you
In light of your mortality your humanity the reality of your sin and
doubt and fear and failure and all the stuff
You're carrying that maybe only your therapist knows about and even
the stuff you don't tell her
What do you do about that? And that's why we're here to say something
true and meaningful about all that
If Jesus came just to give good advice there'd be no cross and there'd
be no empty tomb. He came to do more
And that's what this is about. I want to talk about the Habsburgs and
then we're done

The Habsburgs are an ancient European family
There's still lots of these descendants around for a sent for
centuries. They ruled the Holy Roman Empire
And they if you've seen paintings of Charles the fifth of Spain or you
know the great Judding Habsburg
John Marie Antoinette was a Habsburg as well
And these folks have a ritual at their death that happens
whenever a Habsburg is buried these emperors and kings and noble
people
And they go to the Capuchin crypt in Vienna
And the casket is draped in this impressive flag with the Habsburg
crest and there's soldiers lining the streets as
They're carried up by the Paul Bears to the crypt
And the soldiers are dressed in all this fine livery and gold braids
and with their shining
Swords and the Habsburg monarch is carried to the door of the crypt
The master of ceremonies who represents the deceased
Emperor knocks on the door with the silver headed cane three times
At which point the Capuchin friar inside says who desires entry
And the master ceremony speaking on behalf of the deceased emperor
He's imperial and royal apostolic majesty by the grace of god emperor
of Austria
King of Hungary and Bohemia Dalmatia Croatia Slavonia Galicia
Ludumaria Luria king of Jerusalem
Et cetera
Archduke of Austria Grand Duke of Tuscany and Krakow Duke of Lorraine
Salsburg Stereo
Corinthia Karnila Bukovina
There's two more paragraphs
All these titles
And the Capuchin friar says
We don't know him
The master of ceremony knocks again
Who desires entry
The master of ceremony then lists all the achievements
Of this noble person the causes they've supported the money they've
given the poor people
They've helped the hospitals they've built the church services they've
attended all their good deeds and achievements during their life
lists the whole thing just the whole resume
And again
The friar says we don't know him
The master ceremony knocks a final time
And says who seeks and the friar says who seeks entry
And the master ceremony says a mortal and sinful man
And the door opens
And the friar says let him in
In John 15 chapter 15 verse 16 which we heard today Jesus says to
disciples who are all about to fail in one way or another
He says

I have chosen you you did not choose me but I've chosen you
And what that means that Christ has chosen you
Is that at the end of your life all the stuff that doesn't amount to
much will fade away
But what you will find
Is that you have been given grace you have been forgiven you have been
loved and the words to you will be the same
As the cabbage and friar says to the Habsburg
Let him in
Because Christ has redeemed you
Let us pray
Almighty God
Remind us always of your grace and love to us and let us hear your
words
Let them in
Amen