

June 13, 2010 – Third Sunday after Pentecost
The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

“Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire for your Holy Gospel.”
+Amen.

Yesterday, I saw a 77 year-old grandmother on the CBS Morning Show sitting with her family being interviewed about her recent \$62 million lottery win. In her heavy New York accent she recounted the story: *I was riding on the bus and my left hand kept itching. Now I'm not that superstitious, but when your left hand itches it means that you are going to come into money. So I thought, I'm getting off this bus and playing my Lotto numbers; they're the birth dates of my children. I thought, maybe I'll win ten dollars or something, but \$62 million, what a blessing.*

The poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote, *God loves to see in me, not his servant, but himself who serves all.* It is very hard for any one of us to know whether or not we are doing the will of God. We may experience God's will as a feeling in our gut, a soft whisper in our ear, a pull in a new direction, or even a dramatic encounter, however it is very different than a superstitious notion. We live in a universe ordered by God in which there is free will—there is freedom of particles, cells, energy, and of course our

decisions and actions. Just because something is or happens does not mean that God's will was accomplished. In fact, God's will is often thwarted within both the secular and the sacred.

How many of us believe that the present environmental crisis in the gulf region of our nation caused by BP's well explosion is God's will? How many of us hear on the morning news of the tragic death of four of our troops in Afghanistan by a roadside bomb and believe that this must have been God's will? Who among us has sat at the bedside of a loved one dying of cancer and found comfort for a moment in the belief that this was God's will? Yes our God reigns and is all powerful, however God's reign is carried out through the most unique and loving gift of free will to the universe, first bestowed upon humanity and all living things in the creation.

Like most of us within the Church, the Pharisee that invited Jesus to his house for dinner most likely believed that he was a person that carried out God's will. But something happens that challenges his comfort and all of those sitting at table for that dinner. A city woman, a sinner, likely a prostitute, hearing that Jesus is at the Pharisee's house somehow crashes the party. The uninvited woman is moved to tears perhaps at the sight of the Lord, or perhaps because of her guilt for the sins that she has committed; maybe both. Whatever the reason, the woman begins to clean

the dusty and dry feet of Christ with her tears, dries them with her long hair, and then anoints them with ointment. She proceeds to kiss his feet catching the attention of the owner of the house, and likely the others as well. The Pharisee cannot believe his eyes witnessing Jesus, a prophet, allowing such a known sinner to even touch him: *If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner. (Luke 7)*

As is often the case, Jesus uses the Pharisee's challenge as an opportunity to tell a story—a story of a creditor who forgives two debtors. One person was forgiven 50 denarii, the other 500 denarii. Jesus asks: *Now which of them will love (the creditor) more.* Jesus then goes on to elaborate upon the fact that this woman served him in a way that the Pharisee did not. We may perhaps identify with the Pharisee who invited the Lord to his house for dinner, and most likely was not a person of notorious sins. And yet, Jesus proclaims that within the kingdom of God the sinner can be forgiven, and may even be doing God's will while the righteous person may only think that they are doing the will of God.

What I believe that we must regularly do is re-evaluate the will of God for our lives, knowing that God's will is not always being accomplished. This is not an easy task or discernment. An indicator though, a litmus test for the doing of God's will, is found in whether or not our life is about

serving. Remember the poet's words; *God loves to see in me, not his servant, but himself who serves all.* The woman at Jesus' feet sought forgiveness and served. So what is God's will for your life? **+AMEN.**