

I'd like to offer you a meditation this morning.

It comes from a random thought I had while walking from the altar to the pulpit, a while back - and you narrowly escaped hearing about it, then... So just relax, here it is now:

It's from the line from Psalm 23 used on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. And it goes, "*you spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me...*" And for those of us who learned this from our grandparents it goes like this: "*Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies.*"

And as I was walking from the altar to the pulpit, that Sunday, I wondered what that would be like:

I imagine myself entering a vast hall and there in front of me is the banquet room, with large ornate doors – gilded doors.. And of course I'm accompanied by God.. And as we approach this place, my imagination runs wild: I envision many people: Perhaps tables arranged in the categories of my enemies.. Former employers at one – My creditors and the IRS at another – perhaps a whole section arranged for my ex girlfriends – business partners - former (but no longer) friends. And perhaps a table reserved for those with no particular grievance, but who I'm sure just plain don't like me...

I envision a catered affair, with a head table set for me with all my favorite foods... And glasses of water for everyone else present. And I imagine God has set all this up, just like the Psalm describes.. A table for me in the presence of my enemies.

And I walk up and the doors slowly open and there...

And there is a room the size of a janitors closet with mirrors on the walls with one chair and one place setting empty. (Not at all what I expected) And I sit down and I ask God, "Where is everyone?" And God says, "*They're all here, Bob.*" I said, "*Come on God, I have plenty of people who do not like me, where are they?*" And God says, "*They are not your enemies, Bob. True enough they may not be happy with you. Some you have hurt, some you have given cause to be angry, some just wish you'd grow up – but., they're not your enemies.*" Then God said, "*Truly. Your only enemy is seated right here. I have set a table before both of you.*"

So... I've heard it said that everyone at one time or another has to sit down in the presence of his enemies – and when he does, there will be only one person present.

Interesting thought, huh?

Paul writes, this morning:

*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*

Paul argues the case differently. Paul sets up a division between the Bob that wants what's best for everyone -- and the Bob that wants what he wants right now - he describes it in terms of flesh and spirit but it's an artificial division. In the final analysis, it's one wretched person we're talking about – me. I'm the enemy.

And of course then, it stands to reason that the only help for me lies outside myself. In the form of God's help.

And God teaches us to respond with love. God teaches us that love causes all good things to grow... And we might infer that the opposite of love (selfishness or indifference) causes all good things to decline or to shrink.

Love requires action – love requires giving – love requires us at times to take up a burden – our own burden or one another's burdens.

I think love is the burden that Jesus is talking about in today's gospel lesson. And love that stands as a direct solution to Paul's dilemma – and Bob's dilemma. And possibly your dilemma as well.

*Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

It is a yoke that is light, but it demands much, reminding us of our connection, one to another and lifts us beyond petty concerns in search of truth and reconciliation. It is a burden; but the deal is, the burden brings with it a power that graces the lives of all who know it with a meaning sufficient to answer death without fear, and to answer life with works of kindness and praise.

In Jesus' name,

AMEN