

XVII TRINITY 2016
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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One of my all-time favorite actresses is Lucille Ball. In a classic *I Love Lucy* first broadcast in April 1955, Lucy and her friends Fred and Ethel Mertz have just arrived Hollywood. Lucy is ready to see some movie stars.

Where else to go watch for movie stars than the famous Brown Derby? When actor William Holden walks in and is seated in the next booth...Lucy spends the rest of the episode in a virtual trance watching him attempting to eat his lunch. And the key word is *watching!*

When William Holden has had enough of being watched he decides to do the watching...he props himself up in the booth and stares intently at Lucy trying to eat her plate of spaghetti. Lucy becomes so unraveled she and the Mertz's make a hasty exit...in the process she bumps into a waiter who drops his tray of cream pies directly onto William Holden. That's Hollywood!

This morning's Gospel begins by telling us Jesus is having lunch at the home of one of the leading Pharisees on the Sabbath; and people were watching him closely. Any of us who have found ourselves being watched while we eat know how uncomfortable it makes us.

A man whose arms and legs were swollen came to Jesus. The Fourth Commandment says to keep the Sabbath Day holy. The purpose of the commandment was to make certain nobody worked incessantly...God took a day off...so should we! Everyone needs time off to rest and refresh if we are to do our work well.

By the time Jesus came on the scene a litany of rules and regulations had been developed around what one could do on the Sabbath...how far one could walk...one could do some things but not others. People spent all of their time worrying about breaking the rules and regulations instead of using the Sabbath for its intended purpose...a day of rest and refreshment. Jesus tells us the Sabbath was made for us...we were not made for the Sabbath. What would Jesus do about the man with the swollen arms and legs?

Jesus goes ahead and heals the man and tells him to go on his way. He then asks the Pharisees if they would rescue a son or ox that had fallen into a well on the Sabbath. The obvious answer to the question is, yes! But they stay silent...their plan to trap Jesus in something he said or did has just backfired.

While all of this is going on, Jesus does some watching of his own. He watches dinner guests pushing each other out of the way to get the best seats at the host's table. He decides it's time for a story about hospitality and humility: don't be so pushy and grab the best seat...you might have to give it up and get embarrassed; instead take another seat...you might get asked to sit next to the host and think of what an honor that would be.

Jesus does not like certain attitudes and principles of the Pharisees...especially when it came to how much they enjoyed being watched. They wanted people to praise them for being "religious". Their preoccupation with ritual and ceremonial and rigid interpretation of the Ten Commandments overrode compassion and mercy...they loved to criticize others for their faults. They wanted the best seats at the table because they thought they were better than everyone else.

Life is not an episode of *I Love Lucy* watching William Holden eat his lunch. If we were in his situation we would probably be the ones to make a hasty exit. None of us would like being watched any more than we should spend time watching others...hoping they will say or do something we can use against them.

In the *Oxford Prayer Book Commentary*, Father Massey Shepherd explains what we should learn from the Gospel: "The people who think themselves important in the world may very well find that in the Kingdom of God their places of privilege will be taken by others who are not so self-centered and self-regarding."

God is not much interested in our outward appearance...or what we think about ourselves...or what we think about others. He already sees and knows all of that anyway. He is most interested in looking at our hearts...so let's spend our time making certain they are correctly disposed.

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