

Seventh Sunday of Easter – June 1, 2025

Acts 17:22–18:4 (or Judith 16:18–25); Psalm 149:1–6; Romans 16:1–16; Luke 13:18–30

“First and Last”

1. Nothing like having a “preferred line” and a “regular line” of people waiting for one to lose perspective
 - a. I travel enough that I thought it worth it to get the TSA Precheck, which for about \$15 a year gives you a bit of a faster process through security at the airport
 - b. Before 9-11, I could get through security without taking off my shoes and I could carry a bottle of water.
 - c. Now only if I pay the Precheck can I walk through the metal detectors without taking off my shoes – but now I have to BUY the water in the airport...
 - d. Well, a couple of months ago I was returning from a Presbyterian workshop for newly ordained pastors which I help teach in Little Rock AR, and at their airport I lined up at the TSA Precheck line. Because I’m cool like that.
 - e. Only, my line didn’t seem to be going too fast. In fact, it was crawling.
 - f. And so was the “regular” line, but who cares about them. MY line was slow.
 - g. Eventually I discovered the reason. MY line didn’t have a TSA worker because some equipment was not working, so the Precheck line was SHARING (gasp!!!) the same TSA worker with the “regular” line.
 - h. The outrage!
 - i. The consolation prize for those precious minutes stolen from my life on that slow line was that when I finally got my ID checked at security, I received a laminated orange card that said “TSA Precheck”
 - i. to sooth my bruised and fragile ego, and to let the technician at the metal detector know that I didn’t have to take off my shoes.
 - ii. (Take THAT “regular line” people!)
2. In our Gospel passage some who heard Jesus teaching wanted to know if THEY were on the “preferred” line or not
 - a. Of course they didn’t say it like that.
 - b. Whenever they spoke of the “preferred line” it sounded more like being “on the inside” versus being “on the outside looking in”
 - c. And at times the idea included using the word “saved”
 - d. However, I think we have to be careful here, because Christianity has made that word “saved” mean exclusively “getting into heaven” meaning not getting the penalties God, but the word “saved” can also mean
 - i. *to keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction*
 - ii. *to save a suffering one (from perishing), i.e. one suffering from disease, to make well, heal, restore to health*<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4982/kjv/tr/0-1/>

- iii. In fact, just before this passage in the gospel Jesus had healed a woman who had been sick for years – but the religious authorities had been mad he had done it on the Sabbath
 - e. So, when the crowd was asking Jesus if many would be saved / protected / healed by God, you can ALMOST hear them asking “who ELSE will be saved (because of course WE will be)?”
 - i. The answer Jesus gives shakes them: Just because you went through the motions of religious activities, or just because you come from the right family tree, don’t assume that means you’ve done all which God was asking of you.
 - ii. Just because you think you’re in the preferred line, don’t assume you are
 - iii. In the Majesty of God, the Realm of God, things aren’t how we humans have tried to shape them
 - iv. So much so, that in the Majesty of God the gates are opened wide to people who will come from north, south, east and west, but watch out because the first in line are sent to the back of the line, and the end of the line gets in first.
 - f. What shocked the original listeners shocks us still: Jesus is asking us to question our notion of privilege.
 - i. Jesus time and again is trying to teach that in the Majesty of God things are different, in a surprising, humbling and grace-filled way
 - 1. Don’t focus on the large size of the mustard seed if you aren’t able to see it coming from its tiny seed
 - 2. Don’t be impressed by the beautiful loaf of bread if you don’t first consider how a tiny bit of yeast makes it rise
 - ii. The Majesty of God is surprisingly small and powerful, going unperceived by many until it reaches its maturity and then it becomes expansive and welcoming
- 3. Jesus spent most of his time with those who weren’t on the preferred line, or who had been pushed out of the line altogether, made to feel unwelcome and judged.
 - a. I wonder how ready we are to endanger or leverage our privilege (whatever its level, be it economic, social etc.). Jesus was humble, and courageous, leaving his privilege behind for the sake of people from north, south, east and west whom God both loves and welcomes. Jesus invites us to join him at the back of the line, to be in solidarity with those marginalized, and to trust God will not leave them (or us) to suffer, but stands with us, to heal, protect and save.