

## **The Warp and the Woof**

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Trinity Church in the City of Boston

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By Christ's own invitation we come for the Bread of Heaven, the wine poured for our salvation, we gather to share. Amen.

If we are lucky, we begin to discover the tradition of taboos gently and gradually. Oh, my Roman Catholic friends don't eat meat on Fridays, isn't that interesting? Oh, my Jewish friends don't eat pork or shellfish, isn't that interesting? In this kind of discovering we learn how very valuable it can be to have a tradition that helps one to know who one is as a family, a people, a nation, a religion. Thus we begin to live from the inside out, the value of symbols, literally living from our guts. We learn about gestures, like putting one's hand on one's heart to say the pledge of allegiance or to sing the national anthem. Or some of us bow as the cross passes in procession or some of us cross ourselves or even genuflect. As we learn this body language it helps us to know who we are and to whom we belong. From the very inside of our bodies and its movements we know who we are. And this knowing is good because it helps us know to whom we belong and all of us need to belong. It gives us a sense of self, a sense of at home-ness in the world. We might call this the woof of tradition. But later, we begin to learn that woven in with the good woof of belonging and knowing who we are, is a not so gentle and less than helpful set of tradition and taboo. Woven in, as you will, with the warp with the woof. This warp not only defines who we are and to whom we belong, but it also defines who doesn't belong and never can. It says we are good, everyone is not. We belong; they can't and never will. And for those of us who are religious, sometimes we think that that's God definition as well, not just the good woof of belonging but the warp of excluding.

We hear Jesus address this very situation in this morning's Gospel. He talks to the Pharisees and the Scribes, the faithful religious people gathered around Him. Faithful people like you, like me. And He speaks to them about the problem of the warp, the warp that darkens the goodness of the woof. And He says to them, you've lost track of what's at the heart of the matter. You've lost track of what matters to God. Now we can smile and nod with Jesus saying, Oh yes, it's so wonderful to see Jesus tear apart warp from woof, to unravel this dark garment and pull out the dark threads. We smile and nod and some of us were taught to say, Oh yes, those silly Jews, they should have known better. Maybe some of us still say things like that. But you see the problem with tradition is that tearing warp from woof is not a simple matter. They're so tightly woven together that it's hard sometimes to know what is the good, the woof, and what is not so good, the warp. We might nod and smile as other people's traditions are unraveled, but what if someone tried to unravel our own. What would it be like for you, if you, like me, come from a more catholic side of the Episcopal tradition and you like to cross yourself or bow or maybe even genuflect and someone came along and said, you must stop. That's not at the center of things. Or if you prefer to receive communion standing and I refused to give it to you until you knelt. That's when pulling apart warp and woof becomes more

complicated, doesn't it? And we don't smile because someone has taken away from us what we think is central. We think it matters. And Jesus asks us, as He asked the Jews of His day, the good, faithful Jews who surrounded Him and listened to His teaching, what's at the heart of things? What really matters here? What matters to God? Now you might think and I might think that we could unravel those two and simply by talking it through we could get at what is good, what is woof, and what is bad, warp, that needs to be pulled out. But I think it's harder than that. There are people standing in pulpits throughout the Church today who are probably preaching a very different message based on these very lessons. Because words themselves can be turned, as all of us know, to make them say what we want them to. Scripture can be quoted by the Devil for his own purpose.

So, how are we to know what God really wants and what God considers central? What is the heart of the matter to God? Even Jesus words can be misunderstood. But what can never be misunderstood what leaves absolute clarity of mind and heart are Jesus' actions about what lies at the heart of things. Guess who's coming to dinner? Guess who's coming to dinner? It's not about words; it's about who gets invited and who gets welcomed at the table. Don't you remember that short nasty tax collector, Zachias? Of the whole crowd that had gathered to see Jesus, that was the one Jesus said I must have dinner with you today. Guess who's coming to dinner? Or that "loose woman" who crashed the Pharisee's party, knelt at Jesus' feet, wept and washed His feet with her tears and then dried them with her hair. The Pharisee didn't like that she had crashed his dinner party for Jesus. Jesus not only welcomed her, but said this story will be told in her memory always, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed. Guess who's coming to dinner?

And it didn't stop there. The lepers were welcomed. The demonically possessed were welcomed. It's amazing whom Jesus invites and welcomes to dinner. It all sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Except, when someone is invited to dinner that you don't want to sit next to, and I don't. There are people, for instance, in the Episcopal Church, who think that I shouldn't be a priest, for reasons that I will not go into from this pulpit. There are people in the Episcopal Church who think that women shouldn't be priests. And that we should not have elected a woman as the Presiding Bishop. Guess who's coming to dinner? They're coming to dinner too. Jesus is the host of this amazing all welcoming dinner. Jesus regards everyone who comes to dinner as the beloved bounding across the hillsides from the Song of Solomon. Arise, my love, my fair one, have dinner with me. Hmm.

So here we gather for this meal, this meal made for our salvation. And standing next to you is the person you least want to have dinner with, or kneeling next to you. Will you come to dinner? Will you come to dinner? And come Thanksgiving, whom will you invite to your table? Will I invite the one who doesn't want me to be a priest? Will you invite the one who disapproves of something that you stand for? Whose feast is it anyway? Jesus is the host, the bread, and the wine. This feast of our salvation. Will you let Him pull warp from woof in you? And will I let Him pull it in me? And will we all stand at one table, and eat the one bread and drink from the one cup and call each other beloved? Let's hope so. You might begin practicing in a few minutes. Amen.