
The Rich and the Poor Meet Together

A sermon by Dean Sam Candler
Proper 18 – Year B

I have so many favorite places on this beautiful Cathedral campus! But surely one of my most favorites is called the Cathedral “Overlook.” If you exit the Cathedral from one of the narthex doors, and head south, that is, towards downtown Atlanta, you will come to that place, at the very point of our stewardship, looking straight down the spine of Atlanta, Peachtree Road.

That is the place which most of Atlanta sees when we drive north on Peachtree Road: the strong and steady Cathedral tower, and the Overlook. On that terrace, the Overlook, is a large slab of stone from one of the first Cathedral structures, our second church, constructed around 1888 across from the State Capital (before St. Philip’s moved to this location). This stone slab is not the cornerstone from that building, but it is a piece from one of the arches over the door. Maybe it was a keystone from one of those archways.

At that Overlook, I stand looking southward over Atlanta, and I read the words on the stone below. They are the same words that we heard this morning from Proverbs, chapter twenty-two, verse two:

The rich and the poor meet together.
The Lord is the maker of them all.

(Our NRSV version today reads: “The rich and the poor have this in common. The Lord is the maker of them all.”)

I suspect that some people believe the Cathedral Parish consists of only rich folks. After all, this church sits on a hill right in the middle of Buckhead, maybe one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the Southeast.

And, yes, there are rich folks here. But we are all sorts of other folks, too. And we are also poor folks. In fact, some skeptics claim that, actually, only the poor and downtrodden meet here; because all of us are people who cannot make it in one endeavor or another, we are the unsuccessful and the hypocritical.

Well, time has taught me that the people who meet here at the Cathedral of St. Philip are both the successful and the unsuccessful; and sometimes you might have a hard time distinguishing which is which. The rich and the poor meet together here, just as they did a hundred and fifty years ago, when the Cathedral church was downtown.

Those categories – the “rich” and the “poor” – have segregated humanity for thousands of years. Here we have the Book of Proverbs, written twenty-five hundred years ago, mentioning the division.

But Proverbs, of course, says something else. The rich and the poor meet *together*, because it is the Lord who is the maker of them all. The God of Abraham was a God who brought together people of difference.

The God of Abraham is still a God who refuses to let human social divisions be the ultimate categories. Today, “rich” and “poor” are not the only categories we use to divide ourselves, are they? They are not the only divisions that need divine reconciliation.

Consider the ways that we divide ourselves in present times. As I say the following pairs of words, I will pause. During the pause, listen to what your own heritage and past and experience are saying to you. What do you feel when I say:

Muslim	Christian
Georgia	Georgia Tech
Democrat	Republican
Fox News	MSNBC
Liberal	Conservative

I have no question that each of these terms and names and categories can be helpful. Those words do mean something. They are accurate identities for us. We need to be conservative and liberal and maybe even rich and poor.

But what we need even more is the common acknowledgement that we belong together in the Lord. “The Lord is the Maker of them all” is what the Book of Proverbs says. That’s what was written over the doorway of the first St. Philip’s Church in Atlanta. That’s what is written beneath us as we stand overlooking Atlanta today. The Lord is the Maker of them all.

Northerner	Southerner
Gay	Straight
Tastes great	Less Filling
Hispanic	African American
Black	White

The Lord is the maker of them all! What would our spiritual lives be like if we truly believed that? What would it be like if the person I was taught to despise became, in my eyes, another loved one of God’s creation? God did not make just me and my kind. God also made you and your kind. God made her and her kind, too.

What would it be like to acknowledge that? What would it be like if we truly believed that God is the maker of all of us who divide ourselves by tribe or custom or economics or choice?

Well, it would be like this story of Jesus that we heard this morning, a startling story which makes it clear that Jesus, too, was brought up this way. He thought that he had been sent only to heal and to teach his own kind, the children of Israel. They were his kind, and his people, and his mission. When a sincere Gentile woman approached him one day, begging him to cast a demon from her daughter, Jesus responded to her with one of the most vicious and prejudiced comments that we have on New Testament record.

He said, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” He, a Jewish man, was calling that Gentile woman a dog. That’s how deep the social divisions and customs were at the time.

He called her a dog. Now, it’s one thing if you are from Athens, Georgia; and you are calling someone a Georgia bulldog. No, his words were as abusive and rude as if, in our own time, someone obnoxiously tweets that a woman is a dog.

But the Gentile woman had faith, didn’t she? One might say that, nevertheless, she persisted. There is enough of God’s mercy to go around. There is enough of God’s food, even if it is crumbs, to go around. The Gentile woman knew that the Lord is the maker of us all, not just the maker of the Jews, not just the maker of the rich, not just the maker of the liberal or the conservative or the white or the black or the fundamentalist or the progressive. The Lord is the maker of them all.

Well, something amazing happened because of the woman’s faith. Jesus changed his mind. Jesus changed his mind just like God changed his mind after God had been angry with the Israelites and their golden calf back in the wilderness. Jesus changed his mind, and Jesus was converted that day in the region of Tyre. His own eyes were opened and his ears unstopped, just like those of the deaf man with a speech impediment. Jesus’s mission changed, too. Jesus realized that the God of broad mercy was calling him to be Christ for all, for all people.

I believe in that kind of God. I believe in the kind of God who changes his mind for the sake of people. I believe in a Jesus who changes his mind for the sake of love.

It is the deep and wide grace of God that creates all of humankind, the rich and the poor together. And the Church – the

beautiful Christian Church – may just be one of the only places left where humanity can see and experience, and be challenged by, that amazing grace.

My favorite place here at the Cathedral of St. Philip is a place where I pray for people. I pray for things like “People, stop calling each other ‘dogs.’” And that favorite place at the Cathedral is also the place where I get converted, the place where I get changed and transformed, just like Jesus showed me how to do. No matter who somebody is, a person can still be converted; that person is not beyond the grace of God. For myself, my conversion is always to a mission that is grander and broader than the one I originally thought.

“The rich and the poor meet together. The Lord is the maker of them all.” Those words on the stone overlook here at the Cathedral define our mission every day in this place. People of difference meet here together. People of difference need one another here. People of difference discover God’s grace in one another here. The rich and the poor meet together here; the Lord is the maker of them all.

AMEN.

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Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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