

## Sunday, September 26, 2010 – The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost Luke 16:19-31

### The Invitation

Life had never been easy for Matthew Jordon. Now, except for his leg and a few nagging questions, he was at least comfortable. Matthew's father had died when he was thirteen. The family was fortunate that his mother was a nurse with a steady job, although, it would take many more years before the pay of a nurse would catch up with the responsibility. Matthew had two younger sisters. Sarah was seven and Deborah, five. With two younger children and a schedule that included as many extra shifts as possible, there was little time for a boy struggling to become a man. Matthew worked hard in school even though a number of subjects, especially math, seemed to slip through his comprehension. Since his size and athletic ability had not been one of his inherent gifts, the pathway to the future was limited. Matthew was determined go to college, any college. It would be his gift to his mother for all that she had done and his way of celebrating his father.

The military appeared to be his best option. Viet Nam and a low draft number made that his only option. With few skills to endear him to those making assignments, the jungle would soon become his home away from home. A month before the end of his deployment his patrol was ambushed and he suffered a painful leg wound. It was serious enough to limit many future options, but not serious enough for the military to see it as a disability. An addiction to pain medication ended the pain along with any remaining dreams he had of going to college.

Matthew finally crawled out of the hole the drugs had created and found himself on the ground floor of a future. Unencumbered by family and friends he had traveled most of the United States and much of the world at the bequest of those who paid the bills. Matthew did not retire. He just did not want to work anymore. He found a small house perched on the edge of the Pacific that met his basic needs and he was unwilling to move any farther. The pain had returned.

The small envelope arrived with the assortment of bills and junk mail he picked up at the Post Office once a week. It was an invitation. The paper was old and the writing was shaky and difficult to read. It said very simply, "Please join me. I will answer your questions." There was no name, only a date and directions. Three days later Matthew found himself walking down a narrow, slippery cut stone path through the lingering fog. Several times he had almost fallen only to save himself by grabbing onto a slimy tree limb or the side of a mossy, smooth stone wall. He was about to admit to the foolishness of the whole idea when he saw the small, rustic old house. After knocking on the door he waited. A weathered old man opened the door, looked deep in his face and said, "Welcome Matthew. Please, come inside."

Next to the entrance was a small offset in the wall, smaller than a hall closet. Inside was a stand with a pitcher of warm water, a bowl and a soft white towel. He was invited to wash his hands and face that he might be more comfortable. Matthew left behind the accumulated mud of the journey and part of the weight he had carried all of his life. He was then invited in to a small room with a warm fire and several very comfortable chairs. The old man thanked him for coming and spoke a blessing that seemed to be as old as time itself. As he settled into a chair by the fire he felt a lifetime of impatience slowly drain from his body.

The old man walked over to a small table next to a wall covered with books. A large, very old leather bound book and a candle sat on the table. He picked up the book, walked over to the other chair by the fire and sat down. Then he took out his reading glasses and began to read. In spite of his age, his voice was very clear and strong. The story he read was not about Matthew, yet the words touched the very depth of his soul. It was as if its author knew everything about him, even his unspoken thoughts. It was the story of every man and woman accumulated over the breath of time and it spoke to his deepest need.

The old man stopped reading, laid the book on a small table next to his chair and began to speak. Matthew had spent a lifetime building walls. At first it was a way of dealing with the hurt and disappointment. Walls kept out the pain. They were safe. They also shut the door to compassion and love, both the giving and receiving. Walls allowed him to do his job so well. They also denied him an emotional investment in the world around him. The old man spoke of an acceptance and love that was greater than anything Matthew could even begin to imagine. He began to see that he belonged. He was a part of something reached far into the past and yet had no limit in the future. Life was so much more than his immediate needs and getting through next day. Matthew did not know how long he sat by the fire after the old man had stopped reading. Time meant nothing. The old man then bowed his head and spoke a prayer. He then invited Matthew into the adjoining room.

The room was also small. There was a very old dark wood table sitting in the center of the room covered with a lace cloth and four equally old chairs. The walls without windows were covered in beautiful tapestries. The old man then asked Matthew to be seated. The meal that he shared was very simple, a loaf of bread and a small bottle of wine. The old man spoke a few words, broke the bread and gave part of the loaf to Matthew. After this he poured the wine. As he ate the bread and drank the wine Matthew could feel a third presence in the room. With that presence he was overwhelmed by a feeling of acceptance. Before he had heard about it, now it became real. He had struggled all of his life to feel accepted. In the end he had become resolved to simply be comfortable. He had worked all of his life to prove his value, now it had been given to him as a gift. That day God became real for Matthew Jordon.

The old man blessed Matthew, and Matthew thanked him for inviting him back into life. He knew that he would never see the old man again. The fog lifted as the sun bathed the day in its warmth. Matthew returned to a new world up the narrow, slippery pathway. The invitation said that his lingering questions would be answered. They had, but not in the way he had expected. Matthew's mother had died several years ago when he was who knows where. It took months for the notice to catch up with him. He still had two sisters. He still had before him a new life. The presence of God opens to us an amazing world. Amen.

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