

Luke 14:1-14
“He Who humbles Himself will be Exalted”
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

September 1, 2019
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

C.S. Lewis once wrote: “If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.” (*Mere Christianity*, book III, chapter 8, paragraph 14)

This morning, Jesus teaches us about humility.

So, how can anyone become humble? Well, if we try to become humble, then we aren't really being humble at all.

[The Situation]

In our gospel reading, Jesus is in a place that we may not expect. He is dining at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees on the Sabbath. Now, something we would expect does happen – conflict.

Now, we do not know all the details on why Jesus was dining with a Pharisee, but He was there. He was there with not one Pharisee it appears, since Luke tells us that **“they were watching him carefully”** (Luke 14:1b). These Pharisees and lawyers were likely hoping to catch Jesus violating the Jewish Law.

We also do not know the exact details on why a man with dropsy – a swelling disorder – was also there. Could the Pharisees have invited this man in order to trap Jesus? Possibly, but we don't know.

It was the Sabbath and according to the Jewish Law, Jews were not to do any work on the Sabbath.

While at the meal, Jesus sees this man with dropsy and asks those at the dinner table: ***“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”*** (Luke 14:3b) The Pharisees remained silent.

In their silence, Jesus healed the man and said, ***“Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?”*** (Luke 14:5)

Again, silence. These men didn’t have the strength to reply to Jesus, for they all knew that they could not leave their son for dead. They all realized that mercy takes precedent over following regulations.

[Choosing the Places of Honor]

Now, prior to the dinner, Jesus noticed something else. He noticed how each man carefully chose where he sat. They each scrambled for places of honor.

At a dinner like this, what would be the places of honor?

Now, instead of chairs like today, Jews then reclined on couches at the table that would hold three or more people. Now, the choice places were those at the left end of each couch, since the guests in those places had the best view of the host and the other guests.

So, prior to the meal, these men were scrambling to get the best seat at the table. For me, that would have been a sight.

So, Jesus takes this opportunity to teach about humility as He says a parable about guests at a wedding feast.

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place” (Luke 14:8-9).

Here, Jesus purposely chose a wedding feast because many guests would be present. At such a feast, the place of honor would be the left of the couch, which is nearest to the groom. So, if a guest chose the place of honor before so many guests, he would be seen as “self-important” or “pushy.”

And, if this person were asked to change seats, he would have to take the least desirable place – that is, one on the couch farthest away from the groom and also face deep humiliation in the eyes of many guests.

Now, Jesus isn't talking about proper table manners. Here, Jesus is teaching about humility and not fake humility.

The Pharisees' habit of claiming places of honor at a feast was only a symptom of a serious spiritual sickness: the right relationship with God.

The point of the parable is this: ***“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”*** (Luke 14:11).

Some persons “will be humbled,” while others “will be exalted.”

Now, who will do the humbling? God, of course. These Pharisees were puffed up with conceit over their imagined holiness. They were very proud men. They believed they had the right to judge, but in fact, it is God who judges.

Jesus told them this parable in order to save them from their unholy pride. Likewise, Jesus is reminding us, as well, since we are as likely to fall into sinful pride.

Just this past week, when I was driving to a shut-in, I heard the radio host say, “I am humbled to be one of the top radio shows and I am humbled to be the most-watched cable program.” The first thing I thought was he was not being humble. He is confusing humility with pride.

Many times, we like to show off how great we are to others – sometimes without even realizing it.

As Americans, we don't like the idea of being humble. We argue who is the best at this and greatest at that.

[Real Humility]

So, how can we truly be humble? We can't on our own. As I said earlier, once we think about being humble, we are actually becoming filled with sinful pride. We want to think about ourselves.

Jesus is teaching us to be humble. So, how could we become humble?

We can only become humble by trusting in Jesus. You see, Christ ***“though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”*** (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus humbled Himself for you and for me. Jesus is truly God and He lowered Himself to become man, so that in His lowly state, He would lift us up.

On our own, we could never become humble, because we are drenched in our sin. We are naturally inclined to look inward toward ourselves. We think, “We can do it on our own.” But, we could never inherit salvation without faith and trust in Jesus.

In our sinful estate, which makes us poor, crippled, lame and blind (Luke 14:13), Jesus invites us to His table. Jesus welcomes us. Jesus hears our confession of sins and we receive His forgiveness. Jesus strengthens us as we hear His Word and receive His Sacrament. We could never possibly repay Jesus for all that He has done for us.

Through Christ’s death and resurrection, all who trust in Him receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

You see, Jesus regards you and me more important than Himself. This is true humility. He suffered in order to sanctify us through His own blood. Through His death, He is now exalted. Through His resurrection, all who trust in Jesus are likewise exalted.

We can only become humble through Jesus. We can do nothing to inherit salvation on our own. All we can do is receive salvation by faith through the grace of God. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠