

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 17, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 2:1-5, 65:1, 34, 656, 411:4-5.

Lessons: Proverbs 25:6-7, Philippians 2: 1-11, Matthew 23:1-13.

Sermon Text: Luke 14:1 and 7-14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In case you hadn't guessed yet based on our scripture lessons today, Jesus has something to say about humility. It is human nature to want to be important and to want to be recognized and honored.

Jesus was eating at the house of a Pharisee, possibly at a banquet of some kind and tells several parables. In the first parable he speaks of the arrogance of being invited to a wedding banquet and going right in and taking a place of honor. This could be something such as we would call a 'head table', a place where only the wedding party and perhaps specially honored guests sit.

Today there are often name-place cards at the head table, so we would know not to sit there, and sometimes there are name-place cards for all the invited guests.

At the ordinary feasts of the Jews there was a good deal of informality, but at the wedding-suppers the question of rank and honor was very important. Jesus had noticed at this dinner at a Pharisee's house that guests made an attempt to take the places of honor at the table. Remember that the Jews did not sit at tables as we do. They had couches or sofas so that they could lie down at the table for eating and drinking.

Today Jesus presents

A PARABLE TEACHING HUMILITY

- 1. Jesus admonishes men for seeking to be praised and honored.**
- 2. He then gives us a lesson in true humility.**

Our text includes the first of three parables Jesus told on this day. *"When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable"*. Jesus notices how one after another forces himself to the front, centers the attention upon himself, and seeks to secure a position at the most important table. Each one wants to be the most important, and that is typical of human nature. "I want to be the most important!" For some this takes the form even in conversation of talking only about oneself and only about what interests oneself.

Jesus speaks about the practice of invited guests to pick the places of honor at the table. He tells about a person invited to a wedding banquet who chooses a place of honor. The host is then forced to ask this person to move to a place away from the head table to make room for a more distinguished guest. *"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place."*

In this parable humiliation comes to a proud person who is demoted. Jesus suggests the proper course of action: start out sitting in the lowest place. *"But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests."* The guests will notice when the host asks such a person to take a better place. The general rule is then stated by Jesus: *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles*

himself will be exalted.” This idea is repeated several times in the Gospels. Although Jesus would like to teach this to the Pharisees, he can hope that at least his disciples will learn to practice and to live humility.

Jesus tells us that guests should not strive for the most honored seats, for it might easily happen that one to whom greater respect is due is among those invited. And what a humiliation it would be then if the host would openly request the arrogant guest to give up his place to another guest and have to move to the last place! The Lord advises the opposite method, to choose the lowest place, for then it might well happen that such a humble guest would be invited to move farther toward the head of the table, in this way receiving greater honor.

Jesus was not simply giving them a lesson in good manners. It was a rebuke of the presumption and pride of the guests. His words are an admonition to humility in the most important sense of the word.

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Let’s make application to our lives.

True humility begins as an attitude of the heart and mind. A person should **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves”** Philippians 2:3 (NIV) as you heard in our Epistle lesson.

We must remember that our actions reflect what is in our heart. Simply selecting a place at the foot of the table or the least important table, if the heart is not truly humble, would still be ignoring Jesus. We must be careful that we do not approach God – and our fellow men – with a false humility and merely select a place at the foot of the table, for such a choice may give evidence of the very arrogance which Jesus is condemning. It is the state of the mind and heart which is all important, not the outward act. Such an action may really be a boast such as ‘look at how humble I am!’ Jesus does not encourage a boasting about one’s humility. The external action is significant only as the expression of the heart.

This exhortation to humility is an idea which the Lord has used elsewhere, as, for example, in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. There Jesus tells us about **“Two men [who] went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”** (Luke 18:10-13 NIV) Then, to conclude the parable Jesus says **“I tell you that this man, [that is, the tax collector] rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** (Luke 18:14 NIV)

And from Matthew 23:12 (NIV) we read **“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”** Even Saint Paul is inspired by the Holy Ghost to write in Romans 12:3: (NIV) **“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”**

What is the source of such humility? Where does it come from? How do we learn humility? It comes from God with Jesus Christ as our example. We quote from our Epistle lesson: **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!”** Philippians 2:3-8 (NIV)

Jesus Christ is the ultimate example and pattern for true humility. He did this, humbling himself from his heavenly throne and even dying for us because he loved us.

This was the greatest humiliation ever possible. The Supreme God who created all things became human, born of a woman, born in a stable in Bethlehem. **“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”** Galatians 4:4-5 (NIV)

“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (NIV) It is faith in that Son of God which gives us the greatest honor and exaltation possible.

We are taken to eternal life in heaven because God worked faith in us to accept Jesus Christ as our only redeemer from sin, death, and the power of Satan.

Then Jesus speaks directly to his host but his words apply to all his disciples: ***“Then Jesus said to his host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’”***

A Christian should be inspired by Jesus’ words, which are a contrast to the self-serving and egotism that refuses to consider a single act without the thought of reward, or of the profit that will come from it. Jesus attacks an attitude which fights against the true spirit of love. Jesus encourages and admonishes us to look for places and occasions in which we can give assistance to others. ***“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”***

Such acts of kindness show the fruit of a God-pleasing life and will be rewarded in the future at the time of the resurrection – on judgment day – by God himself. This is not a new message from Jesus. This is a restatement with a specific application of what Jesus said in Matthew 6:1-4 (NIV), in what we call the “sermon on the mount”. ***“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”***

Lord, help us always to bow in humility before your great love as we walk on this earth! Amen.