

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 13, 2009**

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Hymns: 66, 56:1, 411, 531, 656: 1-2.  
Proverbs 25: 6-7, Philippians 2: 1-11,  
Luke 7: 36-50.  
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 – possibly at a banquet – at the house of a Pharisee. In his parable he speaks of the arrogance of being invited to a wedding banquet and going right in and taking a seat at the head table where only the wedding party and perhaps specially honored guests sit. We wouldn't imagine doing that, would we? Today there are often name-place cards at the head table, so we would know not to sit there.

But do you remember who Jesus is? He is the very Son of God who humbled himself – humiliated himself, so that everyone who believes in him would be honored by being taken to heaven.

Our sins make us poor, crippled, lame, and blind, although we don't want to recognize that. We – all men – are by nature so poor we couldn't possibly buy a ticket to heaven. In fact, no one can buy a ticket to heaven, despite what men would like to think. We are crippled by our sins. We can't walk the paths God demands and we are blind to the fact that we need a Savior. We were lost and condemned to hell because of our sins. But we know from the scriptures, such as Luke 19:10 (NIV) that Jesus Christ, true son of God and *“the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”* Because of that we can be honored guests in heaven. But listen as

**JESUS TEACHES THE PHARISEES – AND US**

- 1. Jesus teaches about humility.**
- 2. Jesus teaches about rewards for “good works”.**

Jesus has dinner with a Pharisee again. Luke is the only evangelist who writes of Jesus actually eating with Pharisees, and he wrote about two other occasions when Jesus ate at the house of a Pharisee. In both of them (Luke 7: 36-50 and Luke 11: 37-54) we learn that Jesus was invited. But at the end of the second visit reported, Scripture says *“When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.”* Luke 11:53-54. Jesus must have been invited by someone wishing to trap him in what he said and did. Luke follows up on that by reporting at the beginning of this chapter: *“he was being carefully watched.”* The verses we skipped from this chapter speak of Jesus healing someone on this Sabbath day, and no one present had anything to say either condemning him or saying it is OK to heal on the Sabbath day.

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.

From what Jesus says, it must have been very common for invited guests to pick the places of honor at the table. Jesus' story tells about a person invited to a wedding banquet who chooses a place of honor. Jesus isn't just trying to teach good manners but to instruct people what should be in their hearts, what their attitudes should be. His words are an admonition to genuine humility. One writer, in speaking of the custom of dining in a reclining position, lying on couches at the table, said that the "best place" is likely the center place of three on a couch, that in turn was one of three couches arranged in a group, like the letter "u." Other sources tell us that there were among the Jews of these times many disputes about seats at banquets. We learn that both from the secular historian Josephus and the Rabbis. Of course, the Rabbis could quote and comment on our Old Testament lesson from Proverbs. One Rabbi named Akiba said, Go two or three seats lower than the place that belongs to thee, and sit there till they say unto to thee, Go up higher; but do not take the uppermost seat, lest they say unto thee, Come down: for it is better they should say unto thee, Go up, go up than they should say, Go down, go down. Then, of course, we have 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."*** Philippians 2:3-4.

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 disobedience to God. This choice may display the very arrogance which the Savior is speaking against. Jesus does not encourage a blatant boasting about one's humility. It is the state of the mind which is all-important, not the outward act. The external action is significant only as the expression of the heart. A somewhat similar passage from Luke 18:14 (NIV) tells us – from the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector – ***"I tell you that this man, [the tax collector] rather than the other, [the Pharisee] went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*** 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."***

In Jesus' parable, the host is forced to ask this person to move to a place away from the head table to make room for a more distinguished guest. Just as you heard last week about some of Jesus' contemporaries being replaced at the feast of salvation by persons from faraway lands, so here humiliation comes to a proud person who is demoted. Jesus suggests the proper course of action: start out sitting in the lowest place. All the guests will take note when the host asks such a person to take a better place. Jesus is hoping that even if the Pharisees won't heed his admonition, that at least his disciples will learn to practice the humility they feel in their hearts. ***"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."***

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."***

Even in the Old Testament there are believers who were examples of great hospitality to strangers. Jesus here also gives us a warning against showing hospitality only to those who will return the favor.

If our deeds are truly fruits of faith, the fruits of a noble unselfish love, they will not remain unrewarded in God’s sight. Many generous deeds may pass unnoticed or may be even despised on this earth, while acts that have their origin in selfishness and egotism are praised by the world as great achievements. God gives the ability and strength to do such noble deeds to the poor and less fortunate than we are. God will reward the believer at the resurrection of the just. Such good works or good deeds will show before God as fruits of faith on the last day. In Ezekiel 21:26 (NIV) ***"the Sovereign LORD says: ... It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low."***

Jesus states in our text that there are four categories of persons who should not be invited and four categories of guests who should be invited. What Jesus suggests is the very opposite of common practice. Jesus is not saying it is never proper to invite a friend or brother or someone close to us. It is one’s attitude and one’s heart which is stressed here, also.

The persons in the first four categories – ***“your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors”*** – are likely to return the favor to the host, but those in the second group – ***“the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind”*** – could not. But what a host will not enjoy on earth as repayment for generosity will be enjoyed at the banquet of salvation in heaven. God is himself the model of one who invites all classes of people to his great supper of salvation, as we read in the next parable, the one following our sermon text, a parable about a great banquet given by a great man: ***"The servant came back and reported to his master [that people had all sorts of excuses to avoid coming to the banquet]. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'"***

God's true children serve or “minister” in love to the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. At the resurrection of the righteous, they will be blessed and rewarded for their ministry of loving service to the least and the lowest. The self-righteous religious hypocrites will not participate in the Messiah's banquet at the end of time.

So even though our good deeds, our good works do not earn our way into heaven, they serve as fruits of our faith that our heavenly father will recognize and honor.

May our faith always be only in Jesus who earned the great banquet in heaven for us, and may our lives show forth abundant fruits of faith. Amen.