

## Sermon for Trinity 17 - Luke 14:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited ... and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place ... For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Our Lord’s advice seems straight forward. “Don’t take the place of honor first, for it may be owed to a person more respectable than you.” It makes sense. But Christ is not giving a clinic on 1<sup>st</sup> century Judean wedding etiquette. Rather, our Lord teaches us an important lesson about the kingdom of God. He teaches us humility.

But still, practically speaking, it was to the wedding guest’s advantage to sit in the lowest place, which is to say, to come with no thought of personal merit or worthiness. Then, when the most honorable One comes, namely Christ Himself, there will be no shame. For is it not shameful that men parade about in their own honor and merit? Is it not truly tragic for us to imagine that we are primarily giving something to God in worship; that we are glorifying Him and honoring Him by our own homemade holiness? If we think that we come before His Altar with anything more than our sinful selves, being empty and destitute, we’re completely mistaken! By proclaiming ourselves to be honorable and meritorious (even in His presence!), we seek to rob Him who is worthy of all honor and glory.

Now this was the very error of the Pharisees. They thought themselves most honorable and thought Christ dishonorable. When the Lord healed the man suffering from dropsy on the Sabbath day, He was taking the place of honor to which He alone was entitled: the Fulfiller of the Law, the Lord of the Sabbath. He is the One God who created the universe in 6 days and rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, the Sabbath. He is the Lord who rested in the tomb on the Sabbath. He fulfilled the law after the Sabbath by His Resurrection from the dead, and He fulfilled the Law before the Sabbath by His most glorious death. “And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross ... Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus ... Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

Now there’s a lesson we all need to learn, for humility does not come naturally to the likes of us. Given the choice, we usually pick the driver’s seat rather than the back seat, the captain’s chair rather than the commoner’s bench, the place of honor rather than the place that’s forgotten. That’s the way we run our lives. There’s something in us that doesn’t take kindly to humility. That something in us is sin, and there’s nothing new about that. Sinful pride has been around ever since Adam chose self-esteem over God’s Word and thereby brought sin and death into the world. Pride is nothing new,

and seems to be on the increase. Looking out for #1 is primary. Looking out for the neighbor is an afterthought at best. Self-definition is in. Living in one's God-given identity is out. But searching for one's self outside of vocation alienates one from God and neighbor, which is, by definition, hell. Nevertheless, self-assertion is the name of the game. Exalt yourself and you win. Humble yourself and you lose.

We manage to keep things under control most of the time. But that ugly sinful pride is just beneath the surface all the while. When no one recognizes our hard work; when someone else get the glory we think we deserve, something snaps inside of us. The pride of ours is unleashed. Then look out, because there's hell to pay. Our God has a word for such pride. And it's a word of judgment: "For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires..." The end result of pride is the sure and certain judgment of God. There IS hell to pay.

Fortunately, Jesus has shown us what true humility is all about. As Christians, we bear the name of Christ – should it not show in our outward actions? St. Paul said it this way: "I ... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." When Christ was reviled, he did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten. By His death on the cross, He has given us a new life to live – a life marked not by pride but by humility. For everyone baptized into Christ's death bears the sign of the cross. And by His cross we live.

But we find in Jesus not just some great example of humility, rather He is our very life. No one else in all the world could carry our sin; no one else in the world could bear our sorrow as He has done. No one else could put together the shattered pieces of our lives and make them whole again. "... All helpers failed; This Man prevailed, The God-man and none other, Our Servant-King Of Whom we sing. We're justified Because He died, The guilty being guiltless."

We can't take back the hurtful and spiteful words we've said. We can't undo the ache and the pain we have caused by our proud actions. But Jesus can. In His forgiveness He wipes them all away. He makes us clean. He makes us new. He sets us free to live again.

Learn humility. Recognize your own unworthiness. You are in the best condition to receive that most Gracious Gift and Highest Honor of Christ. You penitent sinners are truly awarded the Highest Honor that heaven can give. And the Lord of the Feast now bids you, "Friend, move up higher!" Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠