

Sermon for Trinity 17 - Luke 14:1-11

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

“Now [Christ] told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor ...” Jesus mocked them. The Lord derided those who had selfish ambition. He scorned the Pharisees with a parable about common sense and about how one can truly be honored.

Nobody likes a braggart, even when he succeeds and wins. Also, no braggart can keep winning, and even if he could, what good would it be? The preacher in Ecclesiastes said, “Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.” A braggart only exalts himself, which is to no avail. But is there another road to exalt yourself? If you desire to receive honor for yourself you must be shrewd. Take the lower seat. At least appear humble. Then you may be promoted in front of men with honor. But it’s risky. The host may not notice you. And false humility does not like the risk. It is a set up for failure. You have to be noticed or someone else could be promoted above you. You must be careful that you are not so humble as to actually go and stay in the lower seat. So seeking exaltation from men is an endless trap. You can’t win. Men are fickle. And everyone who exalts himself through bragging or through false humility will be truly humbled. And this bad news for us. For we all seek to exalt ourselves.

We never walk through life without ambitions. We never fail to notice who is watching, what they are saying, or how it might play out. We plot and strategize. We constantly spin the stories of our lives to make ourselves look better. We cover up our failures. It’s truly pitiful isn’t it?

But thanks be to God that He pities us! In fact, He pities us so much that he welcomes us to his table as an honored guest. Such is the grace and compassion of the Lord that He loves proud men, and that He loves falsely humble men, and will not turn away from them simply because of their sin. So also, the Lord did not turn His back on the Pharisees who brought Him there to watch Him. They were plotting how to accuse Him. They meant it for evil, but He meant it for good. He worked through their scheming in order to invite them to His eternal feast. Jesus’ fellowship is inclusive. He wants all men to repent and be saved. He wants all men, even the Pharisees, even the fakes, even the liars, the cheats, the adulterers, the afraid, the spineless, the gutless, and the lazy to be saved. He has reconciled all men to His Father in His atoning death and resurrection. He has paid for the sins of those who hate Him. He has paid for us. He redeemed the entire world from death and Hell in perfect, unflinching love. That includes us, no matter how bad, no matter how stupid, no matter how cruel we have been. He loves us. He wants us. We were trapped in death. But He would not look the other way. It didn’t matter if His disciples would leave Him. It didn't matter if soldiers would tear His clothes. It didn’t matter if His back and head would pour forth blood. It didn’t matter if His hands and feet would be pierced. It didn't matter if men

would think that He's a fool or a sinner. No cost, not even His Own Life was too much for us. God's Love drives Him to save us.

Jesus brings men into His salvation by His preaching. That's why He preaches the Law to the Pharisees. He shames them. He humbles them. They must be emptied of themselves and come as beggars seeking mercy. He preaches this harsh law of humility only that they would recognize they are trapped in their own self-worship. This is Christ's eternal mission: to gain Life for men, to pull them out of death and into Himself.

That is why Our Lord eats with sinners and does not judge in the ways of men. From the Divine perspective our differences as sinners are really pretty minimal. Judged by the stern demands of the Law there is not much difference between us or a rapist or a serial killer. From God's point of view, sin is sin. In light of the law, we have fallen short just as much as any notorious criminal and we are no better than they. But our pride causes us to make comparisons and expect God to be impressed with our supposed goodness. Imagine a rapist in a human court, thinking he is on the judge's good side because that serial killer over there is so much worse than he. Now, would God's Judgment be more tolerant of any sin than a human court? The Law empties us.

Thus we don't approach God because of who we are. We don't approach God because we are so humble, so pious, or care so much about evangelism. No, we approach God because of who He is. Our exaltation is not in earthly success and growth. Our exaltation is in the Messiah being lifted up from the earth on those violent timbers outside the city gates of Jerusalem. Our glory is that God was born of the virgin to be sacrificed for our sins. Our certainty is that God loves us in Him and welcomes us to the table for His sake. We are a forgiven people, a people who were no people, a heathen nation lost on this dark planet, whom He called from darkness to light, all from His own good, gracious, and free will.

Why He loves us is beyond all telling. It is a mystery beyond us. But He loves us. He will exalt us in His good time. He will welcome us home: our ambitions scrubbed clean, our pride forgotten; our sole aim will be to be with Him and do His will, and to bask in His grace. He will accomplish His work in His time and in His way. His love is beyond all telling, but we can still tell others about it anyway. Not as a slave under orders, but as free men who have good news, like honored guests at a wedding feast who can also invite others.

But remember the work is done. You are free. Jesus Christ is your health, your rest, your certain comfort, and your future. Soon the heavens will part and all creation will hear the Lord of the feast say to you: "Friend, move up higher." Amen.

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