

August 28, 2016
Sermon for The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Luke 14:1-14 (25-29)

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Luke 14:1–14 (ESV)

¹ One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ² And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” ⁴ But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵ And he said to them, “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?” ⁶ And they could not reply to these things. ⁷ Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸ “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, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” ¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

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

Amen.

We have not flown very many times during our adult lives, in fact, I think our children have flown more than we have. On one occasion, after being delayed by an ice storm in Atlanta for almost a full day, we were able to get a connecting flight into Chicago. This was the first (and only) time that we had been on a jumbo jet.

I was in awe as we approached this plane. It seemed so huge! But even in my awe, I discovered the harsh reality of the phrase “Know your station.”

As we were boarding the aircraft, and my line loaded at the front of the plane we first passed through the first class area. These people were already seated in their nice, comfortable looking seats with all kinds of leg room. Some already had drinks and snacks, but my ticket reminded me quite unmistakably, “Not for you. Keep moving.”

We then passed through the business-class section. The seats were wide; there was plenty of legroom. Each seat had its own TV monitor. In the back, in the corner, there was a snack bar. Again, my ticket reminded me to keep on moving.

Finally we got to our seating area. Gone were the drinks, the snacks, the wide seats, and the legroom. It wasn't that it was bad, but it wasn't near as nice. Yes, I was riding coach. At that moment, I knew my station, and I was a little disappointed after seeing how the other classes were treated.

While our culture doesn't spend a great deal of time on the topic of stations in life, we still, evaluate ourselves in light of the people around us and determine where we fit in the social classes of work, home, school, and even church. And sometimes we don't like it.

So we drive ourselves to advance our station in life. And soon we discover that we've fallen into self - exaltation, of lifting ourselves up to the highest station that we can.

Our theme verse for today is Lk 14:11. Jesus said,

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This verse seems to be aimed with deadly accuracy at the lifestyle that many of us are living in, either consciously or subconsciously. With so many around us living in self-exaltation, it should not be surprising to us; it was part of the original sin.

The serpent said to Eve, *“You will become like God”* (Gen 3:5). As good as Adam and Eve had it in that perfect garden, they wanted more. They took the fruit and ate it, and in a literal sense, all hell broke loose.

No longer did they walk with God. They ran from God. They hid in shame. Once they knew how to speak only words of truth to God; now they spoke lies and deception.

Eve’s temptation, her sin, inspired by a desire to exalt self, broke everything. It broke their relationship with God. It broke their relationship with the world around them. It broke their relationship with each other.

The pain of that broken relationship can be felt as Adam, who just a few verses earlier said those tender words of love, *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,”* now says, *“It’s that woman You gave me! She did this!”* We’ve been using the heads of other people to leverage ourselves to a better station in life ever since.

Luke 14 gives us several teaching moments that describe the depth of the brokenness caused by self-exaltation. Christ came to restore our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. Through this encounter with the Pharisees and the two parables, Jesus not only demonstrates the impact of self-exaltation on our lives, but he also demonstrates our desperate need for healing.

The opening sentence sets a rather ominous tone to the chapter. One Sabbath, Jesus is invited to eat at the house of a prominent Pharisee. The text says, *“They were watching him carefully.”* The “they” were Jesus’ enemies, later called out as Pharisees and teachers of the law.

Imagine as Jesus and His disciples are walking toward this prominent Pharisee's house.

Perhaps the disciples were feeling good. They often debated the question of greatness. Here, a prominent Pharisee invited Jesus to eat at his house. Jesus has finally made the big time. He's finally with the "in crowd." With the noises of the crowded homes of the town behind them, they are walking to the left, down the aisle, not even to business class, but into the luxury of the first-class section of town. Perhaps they didn't see the intense scrutiny for the trap it was, or perhaps they did but were confident that Jesus would overcome. The text says that Jesus was walking and they were watching, like He was waiting for the trap to close around Jesus.

What was the trap? Rather, who was the trap? V 2: "*Behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy.*" A man suffering with dropsy. I never really knew what that meant, but dropsy refers to someone who has an excess of fluid that builds up in one part of the body. Some commentators suggest that the common understanding in Jesus' day held that this condition was the result of sexual immorality. There was actually a test for marital unfaithfulness in the Old Testament that looked for a swelling of the abdomen and the thigh to fall away. (Num 5:11–28).

It's possible that this person had just shown up, but it could also have been that he was part of a trap. You see, it's the Sabbath. It's illegal to work on the Sabbath. So Jesus is walking into the room, the Pharisees are staring, and the crowds are anticipating. It all stops when Jesus looks at the man in need.

"And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?' But they remained silent" (vv 3–4a).

Here's the thing: They, the Pharisees, thought they could see everything so clearly, but in truth, they were blind.

They did not see a man in need. They saw a trap for Jesus. First, will He heal on the Sabbath? Second, will He heal someone who is obviously suffering because of his sin and guilt? After all, God is punishing him; who are we to interfere with God's punishment?

In their blindness, they looked intently but did not see. Self-exaltation had blinded them. Their desire to be better became their downfall. To them, the man was not an object lesson on the importance of the Law; he was a faceless bait for their trap.

Jesus saw. He saw a man for what he was: a child of God in need, suffering in the misery and the shame of his disease. V 4: *“Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, ‘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?’ And they could not reply to these things”* (vv 4b–6).

Jesus saw a man and in compassion for this broken man, Jesus spoke the words of life and healing. To be healed must have been amazing for that man, but to be seen as a possession, a child of of God would be more than he ever thought he would be. Our drive to exalt our self - - blinds us to the needs of others around us. It breaks our sense of community as we cease to notice and care for others.

The second event in our text comes in the form of a parable. It’s a bit different from some of the more familiar parables, those, for example, featuring a farmer, a builder, or a servant. In this parable, you are the main character: *“Now [Jesus] told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ‘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. . . . For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled”*” (vv 7–9, 11a).

You’ve been invited to a wedding. At the party after the wedding, there are many tables arrayed with fantastic food and treats to delight the guests. But, as with all things, the wedding party table has the best of everything. You know you don’t belong at that table, so you willingly pass the first-class section, move to the right, down the aisle. You pause at the business-class section of the hall. You find the best seat in this second section. That’s where you sit.

When more people start filling the seats, you're so thankful that you're not in the back of the room—you know, the coach section. Then the father of the bride walks up to you.

You know what happens next. It's worse than just having to be seated in the coach section of the celebration hall. You are publicly humiliated by the bride's father because he calls you out as one not worthy of the plastic plates and champagne flutes. You are sent to paper plates and folding chairs in the back of the room—the coach section of the hall. Humiliation is a miserable thing!

When we exalt ourselves, we lose the ability to see ourselves for who we are. Sadly, by taking the best seat, we might miss an opportunity to be honored with the better seat. Isn't it true, that when we try to make ourselves look better than we are in the eyes of others, we end up looking worse? Self-exaltation results in brokenness—brokenness in our identity.

While we can recognize the need to notice people and the dangers of self-exaltation, we struggle with this parable. Many believe that Jesus might have gone just a bit too far.

Sure, we may not say it, but the fact that we never leave the first-class cabin and go down the aisle to coach to invite anyone up to the feast demonstrates our discomfort at this particular challenge. Our view of hospitality is so broken that the very thing Jesus says not to do seems normal, and the thing he tells me to do seems crazy. We want the best, so why should we take a lower seat?

James says, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people!" (James 4:1–4).

James doesn't pull any punches. But did you notice the truth of the matter? Self-exaltation is nothing less than idolatry. It is an idolatry that has broken our relationship with our

God, with our community, with our identity, and with true hospitality.

I want you to notice something very important. V 11 is an opportunity as much as it is a challenge. Along with the warning, the promise is made: *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

“When you are invited” to that wedding feast, Jesus says, *“Go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you”* (v 10).

Again, *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,”* but *“he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (v 11).

Humility begins with the realization that we are wrong in our thinking and rebellious in our practice. Oh, but this, too, can become a practice in self-exaltation. My repentance can become my attempts to better myself in the eyes of God and others. "I was such a bad person and now look at how 'good' I've become". The Pharisees came to be baptized by John, not because they thought they needed Baptism, but because they didn't want others to think poorly of them. Like it as sort of an initiation, or a rite of passage that they had to go through to show their goodness. However, the heart of repentance is dependence on Christ, not on our self.

The separation of self-exaltation that we put between ourselves and God is defeated by Christ. Eph 2:12–14 is a declaration of certainty. In Christ, our brokenness is healed, and no longer are we separated from God: *“Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”*

Jesus humbled himself. He did not come to be a passenger in first class, business class, or even coach. He came to be a servant of all the passengers, that through his perfect sacrifice on the cross, the brokenness of the sin of the First Adam might be done away.

The driving force of self-exaltation is defeated in Christ. With His blood, Christ has healed the brokenness that separated us from God and from one another. In addition, He has given us freedom from the very thing that drives us to self-exaltation: that is fear.

Listen to 1 Pet 5:6–7: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

It is our anxiety that fights against humility.

We strive to exalt ourselves because we are afraid of others looking down on us; we are afraid of being weak; we are afraid of missing out. In place of fear that leads to brokenness and separation, God gives us faith and His perfect love. 1 Jn 4:18:

“Perfect love casts out all fear.”

Never again need we fear being overlooked and unloved, for by His death and resurrection, Christ has honored us with every good thing.

My prayer is that, as you leave today in God’s perfect love and promised provision for life, you will embrace the community of all believers that we have in Christ. You will embrace your community as you notice people, their needs and hopes. You will embrace your community as you walk in the new identity you have in Christ. As you embrace your community in Christ, you can’t help but to strive to practice a hospitality that reflects the Father’s unconditional love.

This is the new we, together in Christ. Together, we can lift up those in need, because Christ has said to us, whose sins were buried in Christ, “Friend, move up higher.”

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through
Christ Jesus.

Amen.