

Trinity 17 – Vicar Lehne Sermon
Luke 14:1-11: “The Humble Will Be Exalted”
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In Nomine Iesu

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O God, our heavenly Father, we all too often attempt to exalt ourselves and pridefully judge our neighbors for not living their lives like we do. For the sake of your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, please forgive us these sins and move us to rightfully obey your Law by humbly loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. In your Son’s name we pray. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

[Jesus said:] “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.”

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who humbled himself so that we may be exalted, dear fellow redeemed:

The Pharisees were at it again. This wasn’t the first time they had tried something like this. In fact, just a few chapters before our text for today, at the end of Luke 11, it says that “the scribes and the Pharisees began to press [Jesus] hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say” (Luke 11:53-54). You would think that they would eventually learn their lesson and realize that their mission was a futile one, but their reputations were on the line, so, they kept on trying to get Jesus to slip up and do or say something wrong. This time, they did so by inviting Jesus over for a Sabbath meal.

The Sabbath was meant to be a day when the Israelites would take a break from their work and worship God. There were still actions that the Israelites were allowed to do on the Sabbath, but the Pharisees had taken things too far. They had invented their own laws that forbid any amount of work on the Sabbath, taking the focus of the Sabbath off of God and putting it on their own actions. And, knowing Jesus, they would hopefully be able to catch him doing something that they didn’t permit on the Sabbath. So, they all watched him carefully.

At this Sabbath meal, there happened to be a man there who had dropsy. Dropsy was a condition that caused swelling to occur due to fluids building up in a person’s body tissue. Luke doesn’t tell us why this man was there. Since Jewish feasts, such as this one, were semipublic, it’s possible that he came to the Sabbath meal all on his own. It’s also possible that the Pharisees intentionally brought him along to their Sabbath meal in order to get Jesus to

break their manmade Sabbath laws by healing him. But, regardless of the reason, Jesus decided to use this moment to teach these so called “experts in the Law,” and the lesson that he taught them was that **the humble will be exalted**. While this is certainly a lesson that the Pharisees needed to learn, it’s also a lesson that we all need to learn because, like the Pharisees, instead of being humble, **(1) we judge others in our pride**. But we have no need to fear, for **(2) Jesus saved us through his humility**.

Now, the manmade laws that were invented by the Pharisees were originally made with good intentions. Through Moses, God had given the Israelites the Law that he wanted them to obey. However, the Pharisees were afraid that they wouldn’t be able to obey all of God’s Law, and this fear was completely justified. After all, none of us is perfect, which means that it’s impossible for anyone to rightly fulfill any part of God’s Law. So, the Pharisees came up with a solution: they would make more laws that acted as safeguards so that they wouldn’t even come close to breaking God’s Law. However, as time passed, they eventually came to view their own manmade laws not as safeguards but as equal to God’s Law, which meant that they thought that everyone had to follow their manmade laws in order to be saved.

But it wasn’t just the Pharisees’ attitude toward their own manmade laws that had changed. They were also no longer afraid of breaking God’s Law because they thought that they obeyed it better than anyone else. Therefore, they thought that they had earned a place of honor at God’s table at the eternal feast in heaven. The Pharisees were so focused on what they were doing for their own benefits that they didn’t do anything for the benefit of their neighbors. Instead, they pridefully judged them for not being as good at keeping their own manmade laws and, by extension, God’s Law as they were.

But it isn’t just the Pharisees that invented their own manmade laws, we’ve all done that as well, possibly without even realizing it. We may think that there’s only one correct way to honor our father and mother; only one correct way to do our jobs; only one correct way to dress. So, when we see people living their lives in ways that go against how we think that they should be living their lives, we pridefully judge them, thinking to ourselves, “If they really honored their parents, they wouldn’t have to be asked to do that,” or “If they really wanted to be successful at their job, they would do their job like me,” or “I can tell by the way that they dress that they don’t live respectful and modest lives.” And these are only some examples of ways that we can judge others for not living their lives like we do.

In addition, because we do such a good job at obeying the manmade laws that we’ve invented, we think that we deserve a higher place at God’s heavenly table than others do. Sure, we may confess that we’re sinners who deserve only God’s wrath and punishment when we’re at church and when we say our private prayers to God, but, in our pride, we’re tempted to think that obeying our own manmade laws makes us better than others. Of course, that’s not the case. Obeying our own manmade laws is not the same as obeying God’s Law. Rightfully obeying God’s Law means humbly loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, something that we not only fail to do time and time again but also can never do enough of to earn a place at God’s table.

The good news is that we don’t have to do enough to earn a place at God’s table, because Jesus already did enough for us. He rightfully obeyed God’s Law, humbly loving his neighbors in all the ways that we couldn’t. One of the ways he showed that love was by healing the man with dropsy.

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were watching him to see if he would break one of their manmade Sabbath laws, so, when he saw the man who had dropsy, before doing anything else, he asked them a question: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not” (verse 3)? The Pharisees

were silent. So, Jesus answered his own question through his actions by healing the man who had dropsy and sending him away.

This wasn't the only time that Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6), Jesus healed a woman who couldn't stand up straight for eighteen years due to a disabling spirit that she had on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17), and Jesus healed a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years on the Sabbath (John 5:1-17). Jesus showed through his actions, through his active obedience of God's Law, not only that it's lawful to heal on the Sabbath but also that rightfully obeying God's Law means humbly loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

But Jesus wasn't done teaching the Pharisees yet. To drive his point home, he gave an example. He asked the Pharisees, "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" (verse 5)? By asking this, Jesus was implying that, if the Pharisees were willing to show love to their family or animals in such a way on the Sabbath, when their manmade laws said that doing any amount of work on the Sabbath was wrong, then, they should have no problem with Jesus or anyone else showing love to his neighbors by healing on the Sabbath, which takes much less work.

Like before, the Pharisees remained silent. They knew that Jesus spoke the truth. In the same way, we too have no choice but to remain silent before Jesus. We're like the son who has fallen into a well. But this is not a physical well. This well is the well of sin. We may pridefully think that we can come up with ways to climb out of the well of sin on our own, but no matter what we do, no matter how many ways that we try to exalt ourselves, no matter how many of our manmade laws that we keep, we remain trapped at the bottom of the well. After all of our best efforts, we're humbled with the reality that we can't climb out of the well of sin on our own.

Knowing this, there are times when we can fall into despair. Even though we know what Jesus has done for us to save us from our sins, we remain all too aware that, in our pride, we fail to rightfully obey God's Law time and time again, so we don't think that there's any way we could have a spot at God's table. In fact, we know that we rightfully deserve a place in hell. When we put our hope in ourselves, there is no hope for us, but, thankfully, we can put our hope in Jesus, who came down into the well of sin to pull us out.

Jesus came down by putting on our flesh and going to the cross, where he performed the most miraculous healing of all. On the cross, Jesus took all of the times that you pridefully judged others for not living their lives like you do and all of the times that you failed to rightfully obey God's Law by humbly loving your neighbors as you love yourself – He took all of those sins, even the ones you have yet to commit, and put them on himself. By his innocent death on that cross, all of your sins were paid for, opening the gates of heaven for you. You can never earn a place at God's table through your own actions, but because of all that Jesus did for you, he didn't just earn you a place at God's table; he also earned you a place of honor.

While we were trapped at the bottom of the well of sin, Jesus reached out to us through his Word and Sacraments. By doing so, he didn't just grab a hold of us and pull us out of the well of sin; he also washed all of the filth of sin off of us through the waters of baptism, making it as though we never got trapped at the bottom of that well of sin in the first place. Because Jesus cleansed us of our sins, God the Father no longer sees us as the helpless and trapped sinners that we once were and happily welcomes us to his table at the eternal feast in heaven.

We're already getting a foretaste of the eternal feast in heaven while we're here on earth. We get that foretaste in the Lord's Supper. While we're here on earth, Jesus welcomes us to his table to give us the blessings that he won for us with his perfect life and innocent death, those

blessings being the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Our sins are completely forgiven, thanks to Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, but we have yet to enter eternal life in heaven. Therefore, when we enter the gates of heaven, we will experience the culmination of the blessings that Jesus won for us, finally entering eternal life. So, not only did Jesus earn us a spot at his table but he also already welcomes us to his table every time we receive his true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Through the Sacraments, Jesus strengthens us to humbly show love to our neighbors. Thanks to him, we no longer feel the need to pridefully exalt ourselves over others, like we're passing over them to get a higher place at the table, but we now desire to boost our neighbors up, like we're giving them a higher place at the table by sitting at a lower seat. Because we now rightfully obey God's Law by humbly loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, Jesus exalts us to a place of honor. And yet, we can take no pride in this, for it's only through Jesus that we can rightfully obey God's Law in the first place. Jesus truly has done everything for us.

We haven't done anything to deserve a place at God's table at the eternal feast in heaven, but, thankfully, we don't rely on ourselves to earn a seat. We rely on Jesus, who already did everything necessary to earn us a seat. He never exalted himself, even though he's the only one who obeyed God's Law perfectly. Rather, he humbly loved his neighbors and showed the ultimate example of his love by miraculously healing us of all of our sins on the cross. Thanks to the perfect life that Jesus lived and the innocent death on the cross that Jesus suffered for our benefit, we not only get a seat at God's table; we're also exalted to a place of honor.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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