

Written Copy: Humbled by God to Exalt Others-Luke 14:11-14

Proper 17-12th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday September 1st, 2019

Text: Luke 14:11-14

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."

Exegetical Statement

Jesus accepts an invitation to dine at the house of a prominent Pharisee on the Sabbath. The meal appears to be rotating affair where the same group of distinguished Pharisees and experts in the Jewish Laws honor each other by inviting each other when it is their turn to host. Jesus is there because so they can present to Him a situation where they will catch Him sinning. There is a man with Dropsy present right in front of Him. The Pharisees believe that healing the man would constitute breaking the Sabbath. Jesus knows what they are thinking and asks them point blank 'What is the right thing to do.' They don't answer. He heals the man and releases him. Then He points out they hypocrisy of these distinguished religious leaders who would do the work necessary on the Sabbath to save a son or even an ox from death but consider Him wrong to work to save a fellow Jew from a similar fate. Jesus then turns the tables by watching them carefully and observes how they exalt themselves by where they choose to sit. He tells them a parable that demonstrates exalting oneself beyond where God has placed you will result in you being humbled. Live according to a humble and contrite heart that is content with where God places you now in this life, and where He will place you in eternity. God alone must do the work of humbling and exalting. And what better way to live as one of Jesus humble disciples than to demonstrate that love Jesus shares with us by caring for those who can't reciprocate our acts of generosity. Jesus tells us that whatever it may cost us when our good works are not reciprocated will be more than paid back, if not in this world then in the eternity to come.

Focus Statement:

It is God alone who can truly humble and exalt men. Christ came and humbled Himself in a manner we never could or would, humbling Himself to the point of dying on the cross for me. He sends His law to humble and break my heart so that I can hold fast to Him by faith. Joined with Him in Baptism He exalts me to the honor of being a child of God with a standing invitation to the eternal banquet to come

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We are prone to prideful hearts that see ourselves as more important than others, especially those who are the unwanted in society. We see our responsibility in worshipping God as ending when we leave Church on Sunday morning just as the Pharisees saw no reason to love and help those who couldn't love and help them

What the hearer should do as a result:

We are to live out that love that Jesus gives to humbled hearts by caring for those who cannot reciprocate our loving actions. In doing so we can open the door for the humbling and exalting work of the Spirit

Subject Sentence: Humbled by God Exalt Your Fellow Man

At one of our weekday Bible Studies Tom Hansen shared a story that, with his permission, I would like to share with you this morning. When he was younger, say-back in the days before the automobile...well, maybe not that far back. Suffice it to say it was when he was a younger man. He used to work as a newspaper carrier in downtown Flint. He came into contact with people from all walks of life: from the wealthy businessmen, to judges and community leaders, to the auto plant workers, and to the street people. He was not unfamiliar with people asking him for money. He knew those who claimed to be hungry and would ask for money for food only to use it for alcohol and drugs. One day a man that he had never seen before approached him. This man was dressed in nice clothes, was well mannered and well spoken. Because of this Tom was a bit surprised when this man asked him for money to buy some lunch. Tom said his first thought was to send the man on his way.

What would you have done if you were Tom? Most of us have had someone approach us asking for money for food or gas. Many have stories to explain why they are in need. Some of those stories are more like the script from a movie than something out of real life. And they have been from all walks of life. There have been those who look as if they were living out of their car or on the street. There was one gentleman I met when I first came here. I was sitting on the back porch of the parsonage. It was early in the evening, around this time of year. The humidity was low, the breeze was cool and relaxing. He drove into the parking lot and around to where he could see me. He honked his horn impatiently. Thinking maybe he had some serious kind of problem I hurried over. He asked where the Pastor was. I told him that was me. He asked where the "other Pastor" was. I told him that he had retired and moved away. He said that he was hungry and needed money for food. He appeared to be in his early to mid-50's. He was wearing a suit. He was driving a newer looking GMC Denali. I told him that we are not equipped to handle those kinds of requests and suggested he contact LOVE INC. which is an ecumenical organization in Flint. They do the work that individual Churches are not equipped to: they investigate people's stories and seek to provide what is truly needed from area agencies and churches. He told me that LOVE INC. couldn't help him. I asked him why that was and he didn't answer. I told him in my experience if LOVE INC. can't help you then I can't help you. He became angry and asked me

what kind of a Christian I thought I was who could refuse to help a man in need. I gave him the \$20 bill I had in my wallet. I prayed with him. And then I told him that was all I could do, and that he should not come around here again asking for money. A couple months later I had the opportunity to visit LOVE INC here in Flint and talk with their Director. I found out that unlike its sister organization in Oakland County there are those who LOVE INC. would like to help but don't have the funds to. I began to wonder if I had judged that man rightly.

Since then the Church has purchased some Script Cards for food that I have occasionally given out. I plan to purchase some Speedway Gas Only gift cards as well. I've heard stories that seem reasonable at the time, but afterwards make me wonder. Members here have told me about people who come by and repeat the same story word for word that they have told me. And so you wonder if by helping them you are doing the right thing. It's not just that resources are limited. It's the fear that instead of helping them I am enabling them down a path to ruin.

It's in this mindset that I've been studying our Gospel Lesson. At first glance it seems like two rather loosely associated teaching moments of Jesus. But perhaps there is a link that we don't see immediately. Perhaps one we don't want to see.

In the first part of the Gospel Lesson we see Jesus invited to a meal on the Sabbath at the house of a prominent member of the Pharisees. Other Pharisees are there too, along with those who are called lawyers. These are experts in the Jewish Laws. They've invited Jesus along with one other man who is suffering from "dropsy". This is a condition where there is an excess buildup of water in the soft tissue, usually in the arms and legs. It is a sign of a much more serious problem such as congestive heart failure.

This meal was for the Pharisees kind of a "round robin". Each Sabbath one of them would hold a dinner and invite the others. In return the others would invite the host, and it just kept going around and around that way. The same members of the group being invited to each other's dinners. So Jesus and the man with dropsy really stand out. And that's on purpose. These Jewish leaders invited Jesus so they could watch Him closely; to catch Him

breaking the commandments so that He could be called out as a fraud, a sinner, and the false Messiah they believed Him to be. The man with dropsy was seated right in front of Him so Jesus couldn't miss Him. They had heard Jesus heals on the Sabbath. They were watching to see if He would do so again.

Jesus doesn't disappoint. He knows their thoughts and so asks them **Luke 14:3b "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"** None of them answer. They don't want to tip their hand. They remain silent. There is a pause as Jesus waits for their answer. Then he answers by His actions. He grabs hold of the man, heals him, then releases him. It's now obvious that the man has been healed and that Jesus has done it. Then Jesus turns to them with another question: **(Luke 14:4) "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?"** The answer is every single one of them would act to save their own son or their own beast of burden. And that is in keeping with the Law of Moses in **Deuteronomy 22:4 "You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again."** Not only are you to have save your own son or ox but you are to look out and save your neighbors as well. And not just our neighbor's possession but our neighbor as well. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Here was a fellow Jew that was in as much trouble as a son who had fallen down a well. What was Jesus point? That healing that man on the Sabbath was as much a part of worshipping God as going to the Synagogue. It's worshipping God through one's obedience. These religious leaders once again have nothing to say. But this time, instead of not desiring to tip their hands, they have been shamed to silence.

And then we find the tables have been turned. Before it was the religious leaders watching Jesus. Now it is He who is watching them. And what does He see? Arrogant prideful men exalting themselves over one another. Men who care more about sitting in the place of prominence than the welfare of a man with dropsy. To them he is just a pawn in the game to nab Jesus: the humble teacher who is really God in human form, And yet to them, according to how He looks and where He was born, He is not worthy to be the Messiah He claims to be.

But Jesus points out how their actions at the dinner could backfire on them. He tells a story about how someone might choose a seat of honor only to have another arrive who is more important than they. The host would then ask the first man to make way for the more honored guest. There was a habit then, as there is now, of the red-carpet guests arriving at the last moment in order to garner the attention of the rest who are present. So it is that when the man must make way and move down, the only place left is at the opposite end, the place of least importance, where he may be squeezed in with others who are less important than he. And with every step he takes toward this seat of dishonor, the shame he feels grows inside him.

Now if the story ended there this would be little more than Jesus putting prideful men in their place. But Luke refers to this in verse 7 as a “parable”, which means it is a story that reveals truth about the Kingdom of God here on earth and into the future. And Jesus reveals what this truth is in **Luke 14:11** “**For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**” Who is this everyone? At times its you. And at times its me. My sinful heart loves to exalt itself and so does yours. And how do we exalt ourselves? In differing ways by stepping on the heads of our fellow man in order to rise above them. We think them less important than us. We are ready to show that by proving them wrong when they disagree with us. We take a condescending attitude with them to their face, and speak behind their backs. It’s the sin of pride. And it even affects us Lutherans who confess to being “poor miserable sinners” not because we always see ourselves that way, but because it endears us to our fellow man who can be quick to elevate us through flattering words, hoping that we will do the same for them.

God is the only one who can humble a prideful heart. Jesus provides us with the clearest picture of what it looks like to live as a humble and obedient child of God. As the Holy Spirit testifies through the words of the Apostle Paul in **Philippians 2:5-7** “**⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of**

death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Jesus in true humility and love considered your life to be more important than His own. He willingly stood in your place and took upon Himself the punishment for all your prideful and arrogant thoughts, words, and actions. All the ways we have turned our backs on the needs of our fellow man. For all these He has earned forgiveness. We never have to suffer for these things because Jesus has already done so, for you and for me.

But there’s still a matter of our prideful hearts that remain with us throughout this life. Left unchecked they leave no room for faith, especially with their desire to make ourselves more important than God and our fellow man. The sinful hearts of the Pharisees is the reason Jesus came to eat with them. Your sinful heart is the reason Jesus has come to eat the Sacrament with us; the reason that He promises to be truly present here in our worship through His Word. He comes to point out the pride that lurks within us, move us to despair over it, move us to repent of it and desire to live a new life, and then through the waters of Baptism wash it to the cross. He comes to create in us a new heart every single day, every single time we confess that we are prideful and sinful. We see this unselfish love of His most clearly in His death for us and His resurrection. Through Him comes the power that turns us from making ourselves first to putting Him first place in our lives. From Him comes the power to lift up our neighbors as second place. From Him comes the love that makes your heart new and filled with faith. He comes to accomplish these things over and over as needed in our lives.

And how does a heart made new by faith live out its life here on earth? Perhaps like the owners of the Little Caesars in Fargo North Dakota. Jenny and Mike Stevens and their two adult daughters opened the pizzeria in May 2015. Four months later they noticed a man who had been sitting in front of the gas station for two hours. The daughters remarked how the man looked like he was hungry and said, **“We should give him something.” “We brought him a pizza, He was so thankful and so gracious. Then we ended up doing it**

again for a different person. And again for a different person. And again for another person.” After being in business for a year they noticed that people were looking through their dumpster out back for food. So, they put up this sign in their window, **“To the person going through our trash for their next meal, You’re a human being and worth more than a meal from a dumpster. Please come in during operating hours for a couple slices of hot pizza and a cup of water at no charge. No questions asked.”** They began to partner with area homeless shelters to provide pizza at no charge every week. As of a year ago they have served over 142,000 sliced of pizza to the homeless, and they are still in business. When humbled hearts begin to share God’s love in word and action with those around them it becomes contagious.

At Lamb of God we find it important to provide food and assistance for the needy at Franklin Mission, as well as our neighbors next door. We do this not so that they might in turn drop money in the offering plate. We do this because when Jesus makes our prideful hearts humble we desire to share His love with others, especially those in need. And we know that when we share His love through the works of our hands it can open the door to sharing the message of Jesus love for all men through the Gospel. We also do it because it is part of the way we worship our Triune God. As He tells us in in **Hebrews 13:15-16** ¹⁵ **Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.** We do this because of what Jesus was teaching in **Luke 14:12b-14** ^{14b} **“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.** He’s not saying that you can’t ever have a private get together with your friends. He is saying that we should not forget the poor and disenfranchised that surround us. He is saying that whatever it might cost us now to share His love with them will be more than repaid to us in the eternal banquet of Christ Jesus to come.

So; you may be wondering how Tom handled his predicament. Well, instead of giving this well-dressed man money, Tom offered to take him to Halo Burger and buy his lunch which he did. Tom thought that would be the end of it. But some weeks later the man came up to him again. Tom didn't remember him at first until he identified himself as the man Tom bought lunch for. But this time he was offering to buy Tom's lunch. Tom told him how much that offer meant to him. But he said he had a better idea. He asked the man to find someone else who was like he was; someone who was hungry, and to buy them lunch. Tom invited this man to "Pay it Forward". And that is exactly what Christ did for us. He paid the price of our forgiveness that we could never pay. He humbles our sinful hearts and shares His love with us so that we, in turn, might be His means to pay it forward to someone else. That our actions and words of love that come from hearts made humble might change the hearts and minds of others. So that we can all be repaid beyond what we can imagine in the joys of eternal life. Amen.