

Written Copy: Luke 14:7-11 "Where Do I Sit?"

12th Sunday @ Pentecost – Proper 17

Sunday, August 28th, 2022

Text: Luke 14:7-11

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."

The text's intent

Demonstrate that our lives in Jesus' kingdom should not be about glorifying ourselves, assuming we are better or more important than someone else. Instead we should see ourselves as not worthy of even being at the fellowship table with Jesus now or in eternity. Our good works done for our friends don't count. Only Jesus makes us worthy of being at His table in His presence now and forever. He extends the invitation by humbling us through the Law, and then raising us back up through the Gospel. By the faith He gives we are seated in the place of honor next to Him as the Bride of Christ, the Church. And He wants us to reach out to those who are in need and provide His healing medicine of the Gospel, especially those we may not see as worthy of being there, just as we are not worthy. He wants us to share the Gospel that made us worthy and will exalt them to the place of honor next to us.

Focus Statement:

Christ is the only one who makes us worthy of being included in His fellowship banquet now, including the Lord's Supper, and the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. He took our shame so that we would never have to be removed from our spot. He makes us perfect enough and by faith calls us to sit in the place of highest honor, next to Him as His Bride now, declared to be so by faith, recreated to be so on the Last Day

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Like the Pharisees we can judge our own importance in life and in God's kingdom by who we think we are based on our vocation and our works. But those things don't matter at The Lamb's Fellowship table, either here or in eternal life. On the Last Day we will find ourselves removed from our seat and cast out into the outer darkness

What the hearer should do as a result:

See ourselves and our works not through the eyes of our prideful heart, but as children of God, made worthy to be at the Fellowship Table by Jesus. And to be tools for His call to others, especially those we may see as unworthy and unwanted.

Subject Sentence: Only Jesus Exalts Us to Place of Honor at His Banquet

Introduction: Where Do I Sit?

Have you ever gone to a dinner or wedding banquet where you didn't know most of the invited guests? You walk into the hall, look around, and then what is the first thing that comes to mind? "Where should I sit?"

I remember attending the Best Practices Conference in Frankenmuth last year. We were invited to the Bavarian Inn to enjoy their Famous Frankenmuth Chicken Dinner along with other authentic German entrees free of charge. I got there early enough. It was open bar, and I was enjoying some of that authentic German Beer. I struck up a conversation with a fellow pastor that I knew from Seminary. We were engrossed in conversation until it was time for everyone to find a table and sit down. The table my seminary friend was sitting at was full. So, I looked around for the table where the pastors from our Tri-Circuit were sitting. But their table was filled too. Then I saw my good friend from way back before Seminary, Pastor Dietrick Gladden, who is a Missionary at Large for the Michigan District serving in Detroit. We hugged and exchanged pleasantries. But when I pulled out a nearby chair to sit down, I was told it was saved for someone else. I looked around, and there was nowhere to sit, except at a nearby table where nobody was. I grabbed a chair and looked around forlornly. Then an elderly couple came over and joined me. I tried to strike up a conversation with them, but they weren't the conversating type, except with themselves. I looked around at the tables where my friends were, all laughing and having a good time, and I thought to myself, "This is going to be a long night

Now I'm not an extrovert by any means. And trying to keep up that conversation was very uncomfortable. But by far the most uncomfortable experience of that evening was assuming I could sit at a table where there was no room. They didn't mean to offend but being told there was no room was embarrassing for me. And I walked away from that table feeling shame. In our Gospel Lesson today, Jesus seems to be giving practical advice on how to avoid this kind of shame, at least on the surface.

Jesus Gives Practical Advice on Where To Sit

The Lesson begins with Jesus being invited by a ruler of the Pharisees to join him at his house for a Sabbath day lunch. This man was no ordinary Pharisee, he is a member of the ruling council of Jewish Elders called the Sanhedrin. Surrounding Jesus were other members of the Pharisees, religious leaders that the common people looked up to as being especially pious, those to emulate if you wanted to be a good and faithful Jew. So, what was Jesus doing hanging out with this crowd? Well, Jesus, for His part, as He once said, came to eat with sinners. But these fellows didn't see themselves as such. They saw themselves as upstanding members of God's kingdom. And in Jesus, they saw not the Messiah He claimed to be, not even a distinguished Rabbi as many of the people regarded Him, but as an imposter and the worst kind of sinner who claimed to know the Law but did not follow it like they did.

You would think Jesus would be the honored guest, but that was far from the truth. He is being watched very carefully and intently. This ruling Pharisee invited Him in order to set a trap, to create a situation where Jesus would show Himself to be the lawbreaker that they all believed Him to be. And the trap involved a poor innocent man they never would've never otherwise invited to their luncheon. He was a man they considered to be unclean. He was suffering from dropsy: a condition where the soft tissue retains excessive amounts of water, causing bloating. We know today that this is usually a sign of congestive heart failure. And it's the Sabbath, and these Pharisees are strict about no work being done on this day. And they considered healing to be breaking the Sabbath law. Jesus had already been accused by Pharisees previously when, while teaching in the synagogue, He healed a woman who was stooped over and disabled by an evil spirit.

(Luke 14:3-6) 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.

Jesus knows their thoughts and knows why this man is in front of Him, and what their game is. Jesus asks this question that begs to be answered "Yes". But the Pharisees, so intent on trapping Jesus, remain silent. So, Jesus heals the man. And in doing so God the Son in the flesh, shows them what the Sabbath is about. He shows them God gave man the Sabbath to rest from working to fill one's own wallet, and instead worship The Lord by prayer and praise, as well as by loving and helping others who are in need.

Luke 14:5-6 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.

Then He goes on to reveal the heart problem that stands in the way of their seeing Jesus' act of love as being worthy of the Sabbath. He points out their own hypocrisy in that they would most certainly do the work of saving their son who fell into a pit on the Sabbath. In fact, they would even do that for their beast of burden, who is not even a person. And yet they can't see that this man with dropsy is just as worthy to be rescued from his affliction on the Sabbath. They can't see that because of the pride that is in their hearts.

Well, they've been observing Jesus, the not so honored guest of this banquet. Now it's Jesus turn to observe them. He sees their sinful pride in action in the manner in which they vie for the seats of honor at the banquet table. Those who sat closest to the host, that head Pharisee, would be in the seats of greatest honor. And so, the rest tried to sit as close to him as possible. Perhaps they were even arguing with each other on who should sit where. Picture a game of musical chairs without the music. For them Jesus has some great practical advice.

Luke 14:8-9 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.

Don't assume in your prideful hearts that you are more important than you think you are. Don't assume to sit in a seat that actually is reserved for someone more highly regarded than you. At that time, it was customary for the important people of honor to arrive late. They arrive, you get kicked out of your seat, and the only place left is the one furthest from the host. And you must, in front of everyone else's eyes, slink to that seat in shame.

Luke 14:10 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.

Jesus says "Take that seat furthest away to begin with. Let the host come and move you up and thereby exalt you in front of your peers instead of shaming you in front of them. It's very practical advice, and if that is as deep as this teaching goes it might be worthy of a Bible Study, but not a sermon. But there is something deeper here. Why didn't they realize this before and do it? Why does this idea seem unfavorable even to us today? We, like they, are reluctant to take the furthest seat because we might never be noticed and moved up but remain the whole banquet sitting farthest away from where all the action is, where all the laughter is, and where important discussions happen. They would be offended, thinking they deserve to sit closer, deserve more honor than that. And perhaps we would too. That is the sinful pride that exists in their heart, as well as in yours and mine. But there's still more Jesus would teach them and us.

Jesus Teaches Us Our Place At His Kingdom Banquet

Luke 14:11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

It is here with this maxim that Jesus reveals the true reason He is sharing this advice with them and us. It is here that we find His kingdom truth. Everyone who exalts Himself will be humbled. Everyone. Pharisees, as well as you and I. Yet Jesus is not really talking about an earthly banquet or meal. He is using this as a symbolic illustration of life in His kingdom, the life we are to live out in faith toward Him as His Church.

None of us in and of ourselves are worthy of having a place at the Table of Fellowship with Him. None of us are worthy of being precious children of the Heavenly Father. We are all prideful in one way or another. We all at times see ourselves as worthy of our place because of who we are, what we do, how much we give, what a nice person we are, (at least to those who are like us too). But the truth is that because of our sinful pride we don't deserve a place in His kingdom. We don't deserve a place at His table which is the Lord's Supper. Neither do we deserve a place at the banquet that the Lord's Supper is a foretaste of: the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom Which Has No End. This feast symbolizes our eternal life to come. What we deserve is to be cast out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

That's the Law. And it's harsh. It's meant to humble us. Its mission is to break those proud hearts of ours, so that the Holy Spirit can mend them with Gospel. So that Jesus can exalt us to a place of right standing with the Father through His life, death, and resurrection. He earned for you that special place of prominence in His kingdom as a beloved child of the Heavenly Father. He has removed from you all that would offend and make you unworthy, all the sinful pride which makes us see ourselves as better than we are. Instead, in the Gospel, we see Jesus as the reason we have a place in His kingdom now, and at His table for the Lord's Supper. And it is only Jesus that earns for you a place in that eternal banquet to come.

And what is that place? How exalted is it? It's the highest position anyone could seek. At a wedding banquet the places of honor are reserved for the bride and the groom. And what does Jesus' work in His death and resurrection declare you to be? The Bride of Christ! He draws you close to Him by faith and gives to you that honored spot of being present with Him always through His Word and Sacrament, and especially in the Lord's Supper where our Savior joins intimately with your body and soul by His real presence. His Spirit has taken up residence in you in your baptism, so that every moment of every day is lived out by your Savior's side. And by faith we look forward to that feast of which the Lord's Supper is only a foretaste of, and our place there that is assured by Christ at The Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom Which Has No End. In the new heavens and new earth, we will live out our days in His real presence forever, made completely and eternally worthy in the resurrection, where He gives to you your new body and new soul, both of sinlessly perfect.

Jesus at Work to Keep Us in Our Place

Our Savior wants to keep us in mind of this truth, not just through this one particular Gospel Lesson on this particular Sunday, but every Sunday as we gather for worship. He works to break our proud hearts as we confess before Him and one another that we are indeed poor sinful, prideful, broken human beings. But in the Absolution, we have His healing hand mending our broken hearts. We have His promise that we have been forgiven, and His declaration of what we could never be on our own, that which His death and resurrection declares us to be, precious children of the Heavenly Father with an honored seat at His banquet table now and into eternity. Left un-reminded of this we begin to be and act like Pharisees, seeing ourselves as deserving of all the temporal and eternal blessings we've been given. But Jesus comes to us in His word to set us right and reminds us of that place of honor we have now and forever as His Church.

Conclusion

As I sat there at that table in Frankenmuth, thinking it would be a long night, all of a sudden, things changed. Unbeknownst to me the Lord had a special treat in store. Someone whom I never thought I would be sharing dinner with came over and sat down next to me. Greg Seltz, former speaker of the Lutheran Hour, host of several of our Video Bible Studies. He now works for the Synod in Washington DC as spokesperson for the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty, advocating on behalf of the Church to lawmakers and presidential advisors about what we believe and confess to be Biblical truth. I had attended one of his breakout sessions earlier, and before that heard him present at Pastor's conference earlier this year. I didn't have to worry about carrying the conversation, he did that very well. But it was interesting to hear his back story, how Christ had been at work in his life to bring him to where he was today, and the ways he and others are at work to ensure the Church can preach law and gospel for as long as possible.

When it comes to God's kingdom you and I were born sitting outside of it, with not even the lowest place available at the table. That's when Jesus came to you in baptism. And through the Holy Spirit shared His work with you through the Gospel Message that didn't just inform you but changed your life to make you good enough, not just for a spot at the Fellowship Table, but the place of honor as the Bride of Christ, right next to our bridegroom. And He comes to you today to remind you of the reason you are declared worthy now and for eternity to come. He works to keep you and I humble. And to open our eyes to those around us, to whom we can share that Gospel Message with, so that they too can join us at that Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. Amen