

Sermon Trinity 17 2020

October 4, 2020

Luke 14:1–11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

One Sabbath, when [Jesus] went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. You could say they were watching Jesus like a hawk. Or as I was reading about this, one of the dictionaries I read said that Aristotle used this same word about eagles. He said that eagles would sit in view of the water, and as waterfowl would dive to get their food, the eagles would watch them like this until they would reemerge from their dive. Then the eagles would dive bomb their pray and eat them. These Pharisees are watching Jesus like this eagle, seeking how they can dive bomb Him and devour His credibility.

Now take a second and think about that. These Pharisees are watching the Author of Life that they could trap Him in some way and make Him look bad. Of course, we can talk about the ability to be sympathetic. We can talk about how it's sad that they didn't recognize who this was in their presence and the consequences that would come because of that. We can also relate to how we don't heed our Lord either. But it doesn't matter. None of that matters, because it doesn't get much more arrogant than that does it? Arrogance doesn't much surpass the thought that one can watch over God in order to catch Him in doing something wrong.

But before we go there, it's probably good to understand this a bit more. To understand the Pharisees a little bit. What's this watching all about? Well, you all know the command to remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy. You likely remember also that when the Lord gave the command to Moses on the Mountain, it was grounded in the fact that God rested on the Seventh Day of creation. God created in six days, and rested, so also the Israelites were to rest on that Seventh Day. And that Pharisees as they liked to make sure they kept all of the commandments to a T had determined just how much work one could really do and still keep the Sabbath rest.

Now to be sure if they just had their way of keeping the Sabbath and that was how they did it, that would be fine. You know, just like it's OK for us to say that we have our way of observing the Divine Service, where today we're following Setting 3, the old TLH setting, and that's good. But if we would say you HAVE to do that setting for the service

or you didn't actually keep the Sabbath holy, that would be a problem. That would be making a tradition of man a command of God.

That's what the Pharisees are doing. They're watching Jesus like eagles that they can devour Him if He steps over their rules for keeping the Sabbath. They're waiting to pounce on Him like lions if He doesn't show Himself to be doing what they think He should do.

And why is this? What's going on for them to do this? Well, what's hard is that they are probably justifying it to themselves by saying that they are trying to defend God. They're maybe trying to make sure that this teacher isn't going to teach people wrongly. But what's really happening? Really they're just trying to make themselves look good. They're just trying to show off how holy and pious they are, and just how miserably this Jesus stacks up against their piety.

And why do they want to do that? Think about it. I think you all can relate. We've all been in that spot where we want the world and everyone in it to know just how right we are, haven't we? If you can't relate personally, which I'm sure you can, then just think about what we see on social media these days. There it is, the great court of social media. The land where you can get instant gratification for your ingenious ideas, and utter justification for all of the ways that you are right.

I was talking this week to someone who made that point. He said he wished that we could totally do away with social media. And apart from the fact that we're able to get our sermons and devotions out on YouTube and Facebook, and the like, I totally agree. Sure, there are some good things these platforms provide, especially when it comes to the spreading of the Gospel. But otherwise they've exploded into the mass means of self-justification.

Well the Pharisees didn't have Facebook, but they wanted the same thing. They wanted ultimately to make themselves out to be better than Jesus so they could be justified. And Jesus knows their hearts, so He saw right through it, didn't He? And what does He do?

Well look at the scenario. There are the Pharisees watching Jesus, and He knows it. Then the man with dropsy comes. And what does Jesus do? Well, we know He heals the man. But first what does He do? He asks them a question to test them back. **"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"** And you can see the Pharisees are stuck. How do they respond? I mean this isn't on their list of 39 apparently accepted categories of works on

the Sabbath. Their lists said, “you can take x number of steps, and do y to prepare food,” but I don’t think they said, “you can also perform one miracle but no more.” So how do they respond? Well it’s not on their list, and yet they know that this man needs care. If they say it’s not permissible, that’s unloving, but if they say it is, what about their list? There’s no way out and they know it, so they are silent.

And so Jesus answers it for them. He says, “**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 reality is that they all would, and they all know it. Sometimes you just have to put the list aside for a minute and deal with people according to grace. But they want to be right, they want to look good, and so they don’t answer.

As I say that, then, you all know one of the things we talk about a lot is Law and Gospel. We talk about the Law as commands, as the Word from God which shows us our need for His forgiveness and mercy, and the Gospel as that mercy in Jesus. This question was some of the greatest of Law. How so? Because it shuts them up and holds them accountable. It takes away every ability for them to justify themselves. You see that’s what the commands do.

I am teaching our confirmands this right now. We’re in Romans chapter 3. I’m guessing most of you don’t recall that whole chapter, but you’re probably familiar with 3:23-24: “**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**” Well, just before that, Paul has been talking about how none of us are good, about how no one does good, no one seeks God. And then he says, “**Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.**” In other words, these commands come and they take away your ability to talk and justify yourself. It’s just like when kids get in trouble and they want to give every reason as to why it’s someone else’s fault and the parent says, “stop it. Just stop.” The Law does that to us.

And that’s what Jesus is doing to the Pharisees. Do you think that He’s really trying to make the point that they should add healing to their list of works on the Sabbath? No. And you can see it by where He goes from there with the seating at the tables. This is about humility. This about the humility to hear what the Law says, what the commandments say, and for them to quit making themselves look good by it, but instead shut their mouths, humble themselves and see their need for the Messiah.

And that's for us to hear too. Think about all of the ways you like to be right. There are all the temptations that we experience in the court of opinion on things like social media, but there's a lot more, isn't there? There are the ways you look down on others for their sins. There are the ways you look down on others for their lack of devotion and their lack of love. And with that there is the justification that you seek.

In fact, that seeking of justification goes way beyond looking down on others. You want to be justified in the eyes of others in so many ways. You want the affirmation that others give. You want them to look at you and see you for being so put together, and so good, and so right. And the law says to you that you aren't and it crushes you. And that hurts. Why does it hurt? Because it's humiliating.

But Christian, you have the One who was humiliated for you. When it says that **"everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted,"** who was the most humble of all? Who was so humble, His birth was in a barn? Who was so humble, He gave up the riches of an eternal kingdom to suffer for you? Who was so humble, He took your place, dying for your failings, for your shame, for your sin? And who was so humble He willingly took this death naked, nailed to a cross for all to see?

Obviously, you know the answer. But that's the glory of this truth. He has died to be your justification. You want to have your justification before other people. You want to look good for them. In fact, God has even made you to hear a voice of affirmation. But He has made you to hear His voice of affirmation. That voice which says, "I have so loved you that I have given my only Son that you would have eternal life." In other words, that voice which says, you haven't earned this, but I am so gracious and loving, I give it to you because my Son has earned it for you. And that is what He tells you as He absolves you, returning you to the promise of His grace first given you in your baptism. That's what He tells you when He says to you, "Take eat, this is the body of Christ. Take drink, this is the blood of Christ." Quit worrying about justifying yourself, quit worrying about making yourself look better than others, quit worrying about being right. Instead rest in His righteousness, His justification won for you on the cross, and the promise of His eternal life in the resurrection. These are yours, on the Sabbath, don't be Pharisees seeking to rest by checking off the list. Seek to rest in Him, because that is fullest rest of all. Amen.