

Sermon Proper 17 2019

September 1, 2019

Luke 14:1-14

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.

I think I have mentioned before that Luther is purported to have said that God is the God who creates out of nothing, therefore He makes man nothing that He might make something out of him. In view of our Lord's Words this morning we could perhaps shorten that a bit to say that when man is nothing, then God makes something out of him. As Jesus said, **"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."**

As we consider those words, then, I think we could all agree that our time is a time of little humility. If you look around there are constant demonstrations of self-exaltation. Look around in the world and you'll see all sorts of indications of people pretending to know more than we actually do. You'll see them doing this very authoritatively and drawing attention to themselves as they do so. For example I don't know if you've heard of the phenomenon of virtue signaling. The Urban Dictionary, a website dedicated to giving definitions of slang terms, describes virtue signaling in this way: *"To take a conspicuous but essentially useless action ostensibly to support a good cause but actually to show off how much more moral you are than everybody else."* It then gives an example of a use in a conversation.

*Fred: I see George has changed his profile picture to show his support for refugees.*

*Barbara: Has he donated money or time? Is he giving English lessons? Is he making a room available?*

*Fred: No, no, he's just virtue signalling.*

And you can see the lack of humility in that. Of course, as I say that, the example used is something that would by many be considered a left wing cause, this isn't just limited to the left. The right can virtue signal in their own ways too. No matter who's doing it though, it shows that someone wants to put them self forward and be justified before man in their virtue and greatness.

As I say that, the greatest way that we see a lack of humility in the world, however, is a denial of what our Lord says to us in His Word. Think about all the ways that we see that. We have determined that we will define what is good according to what we think is best. "I just don't think God would be that upset about that." Or "I think God has bigger things to worry about than whether I covet things that belong to

my neighbor” or fill in the blank there. Or “I can’t believe in a God who would allow the terrible things that I see in the world.”

What is being spoken there? There’s a lack of humility. There’s an assumption that I must know better than God because I’m smarter than what I hear in the Bible. And as I say that, let’s not pretend that this doesn’t happen in the church. There are often people in the church who have decided—and often without much biblical research in the matter—that there is something that they don’t like and aren’t going to believe. All the more that they’ll be offended by. Now as I say that, I’m not talking about us reading God’s Word and finding things challenging. We should constantly be challenged by that word.

I know I have told you about someone that I took through a membership class who at the conclusion of the class had some questions about certain things, and when I showed him the biblical support for our confession said, “I don’t like it, but I believe it’s true. Is that OK?” And I said, “Yes, that’s OK, that’s what faith does, it believes God’s Word even when we don’t like it.” You see that’s humility. That’s making ourselves nothing before God, and trusting that His way truly is better.

Now as I say that, Jesus in the lesson today speaks of two sort of examples of humility. The clearest is in the context of the verse I read at the beginning. It’s where Jesus takes note of how the people at the party are vying for the best spots. And as I say two, I’m lumping the call to invite those of limited ability to your party in with this. And that’s where He’s telling people to stop thinking so much of themselves that they try to get the honor in these circumstances. He’s even saying to have the humility that you don’t have parties where you intend to receive some kind of repayment. Your repayment will come from God Himself at the end. Then there’s the other example. There’s the example of the arrogance the Pharisees have with regard to healing on the Sabbath.

Now it’s easy for us to look down at them for this, to think how obvious it is that we should love our neighbor that we shouldn’t use the Sabbath as an excuse not to. But let’s consider this with some depth for second and see what’s really being said. First of all, this isn’t to say that we should use the care of our neighbor as an excuse for constantly not observing the Sabbath. We need to avail ourselves of God’s gifts constantly. And there’s a reason God gave us the Third Commandment as a part of the First Table of the Law—the portion of the Law focusing on loving Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. There’s also a reason that He gave the first table

before the second table about loving our neighbor. So we can find ways to keep the Sabbath and care for our neighbor.

That said there are emergencies. If you would find yourself coming to church and there's a fire in a house, the fire truck isn't there yet, and you see someone you can save, save them! Be late for church. If it takes that long, miss church. Don't use the Law there as an excuse to not love.

Now that's an easy example. Let's acknowledge that sometimes we do the same thing in other places. In our pride, we use the Law to justify just how good we are, and we pat ourselves on the back for doing the right thing.

But **“everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** Humble yourself. Make yourself low. Think about what Paul says in his letter to the Philippians. **“complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”** And then think about what Paul does next.

You see Paul speaks of this call to humility and then he speaks about how this is the mind of Christ. This is what we see in Him. We see in Jesus the greatest of humility. Look at Him. Here He deserved to have the greatest comfort in the world. He deserved to have the greatest of wealth in the world. He deserved to have the greatest of honor in the world. The people around Jesus should have carried Him from town to town on a throne. And I say that not just because He was so loving, but because of His very nature. Here He was, God in the flesh, and yet what did He do with that? Did He build a palace, or make others build it for Him? Did He demand money from people? Did He demand their service? No. The Son of man had **“no place to lay His head.”** No, The **“Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

And we see most of all that service in His death on the cross. We see most of all that humility as this God in the flesh humbled that flesh, was mocked, hanged naked on a cross, and the Holy God bled and died for the sins of unholy, arrogant, prideful men. Unholy, arrogant, prideful you. And in joy, then we see how He was raised in the promise that this sin was forgiven.

Now, as I describe this humiliation, something I often like to point out is which nature was humiliated. If I were to ask you that, what would you say? Would you say that the human nature was humbled or the divine? You see often we think of this as a

humiliation of the divine nature, that it is a humiliation for the infinite, glorious, uncreated divinity to enter into the finite, less glorious creation. And we must acknowledge that this condescension is a marvel. We can't deny that. But as Lutherans—and this is a sort of uniquely Lutheran thing, even though Paul almost literally says it in that section of Philippians I just referenced—no as Lutherans we say that the humiliation was of the flesh, of the humanity.

And the reason I point this out is because of what we learn from understanding that. First of all we learn something about our own flesh. That is to say, think about yourself. What would you do with that power of the divinity? You'd likely serve your own ends, wouldn't you? Give yourself some of that comfort, some of that honor, some of that wealth. Sure, you're not totally selfish, you'd probably share a lot, but you'd make sure you got plenty too. Or maybe you grasp how that would be a misuse, so how would you respond on the cross. Remember Jesus there naked and being mocked? "If you're the Christ prove it!" Do you think it took every ounce of strength to swallow all pride, all knowledge that He was that Christ to not come down from that cross?

And there you learn about the weakness of your own flesh, but also about the love of God. This is the second part. When we speak of the humanity as humbled, we're acknowledging a certain humility revealed in Christ's life about the pure love of God. There's an inherent humility in God such that He has loved you so much that He has seen you as worthy of entering into the world and bearing your sin.

To put this into the terms of the reading, God has seen you in the poverty of your sin, in the crippling effect that it has on you. He has seen just how blind it makes you, and knowing you can never repay Him, He has called you to the feast by forgiving your sins and clothing you in the robe of the righteousness that's not your own. Even now He calls you to the foretaste of that feast in Jesus' body and blood.

Hear then that invitation, Christians. Hear that and humble yourself. God is the God who makes something out of nothing, so be made nothing by Him that He may make something out of you. All the more cling to the promise that as you have confessed and repented of your sin, He has joined you to Jesus, He has baptized you in that death and resurrection. And in that you are joined to the One who was the most humble, the One who has been rightly exalted to the greatest seat of all, the right hand of the Father. And this Jesus promises to carry you to that feast with Him, not because you deserve to be there, but because He wants you there in His gloriously humble love for you. Amen.