**Luke 14:1-14 August 28, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 14 here re-reading these words. “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, 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. 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.’” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Pride and humility. When the proud are humbled they feel shame and embarrassment. When the humble is exalted there is great honor from going to low to high. Look at rags to riches stories, look at reality show stars who won talent competitions people coming from nothing and now they are a star, think of people in your own life who came from so little, and were given no chance of success and yet achieved it. We love to see the humble exalted, the little guy get a chance. We also love to see the proud humbled. The fall of the great and powerful in our midst, down to earth just like the rest of us. Some scandal, some problem, something to knock them off their pedestal. Oh how sweet it is to see the high and mighty brought down from their thrones. But where do we fit in to all this? Are we the proud or the humble? My guess is we see ourselves as somewhere in the middle, certainly not the richest and most powerful in our communities but also not the most humbled, the poor, the destitute, the one who rely only upon the generosity of others to survive. What this means is that we don’t need to be exalted or humbled, we can keep doing what we’ve been doing, which is the most dangerous place to be of all.

There are two humbling scenes that we find in our Gospel lesson for today, both would make you look like a fool. The first is to invite someone into your house, have them recline and eat at your table, and look dumbfounded whenever they ask you a question. It’s the Sabbath, the holy day of rest, and Jesus is spending it with a ruler of the Pharisees. Why is the greater question. Jesus is not ignorant to the fact that they want to catch him in some form of blasphemy so they can kill him. Jesus knows they are out to get him, and yet he goes right into the lion’s den. The scene has been set up perfectly, Jesus is dining with them when somehow a man with dropsy just appears. The trap is obvious, get Jesus to break the laws of the Sabbath by healing this man, which is what makes Jesus response in a way so comical. Here the omniscient all knowing Son of God turns to these masters and keepers of the rules of the Sabbath to ask them, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” And they remain silent. They invite him into their homes, they sit down to eat with him, they set up this trap so that he will heal this man in his compassion for him and his humble estate, dropsy was a disease that caused swelling in this man’s body, and yet Jesus just humbles them in their power and authority, even in their own home. They are silent, looking like fools, like chumps, they are humbled in the presence of the power of God. Jesus heals the man, blesses him and sends him on his way, then calls out the hypocrisy of these men. “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?” And of course they could not reply because they were convicted. Hey guys, if this was your son you would help him, Sabbath or not, and you’ve broken these rules when it suits you for the good of those you care about. Isn’t Jesus doing the same thing?

Pride can get you into some really silly places in life, it’s no different for us. Pride is what gives us these viral videos of people who are yelling at police officers or yelling at cashiers of different stores. The summary of it all is a simple concept: The rules don’t apply to me. That’s what the Pharisees were faced with. They enforced the Sabbath rules for others, and were meticulous about what you could or couldn’t do based on the Levitical Law, but when it came to their own perfect keeping of it they disregarded it in situations where they felt they didn’t need to follow it. We are the same way, and guilty of the same things. We read the 10 Commandments, we look at the rules and laws of God, and we want everyone else to follow them. We want them to be good Christians, but then we excuse our own behavior when we act outside of what God says for our own convenience or supposed need. We are quick to point out the speck in our brother or sister in Christ’s eye, ignoring the plank in our own. And the reason is pride. We are the good ones. We like to think we are just in the middle, or even the lowliest and most humble, that’s how we want others to see us, but in reality, when we get past all the supposed humility we really feel deep down in our hearts that we are the good ones, we are the better ones, and we get special privileges. We are the proud who must be humbled, made to look foolish, and like chumps, in the face of the Word of God which reveals us to be the sinners we are. You don’t think the rules apply to you? Think again. The Law says you must be perfect as God is perfect and therefore any breaking of God’s law means you are doomed to an eternity of suffering. No exceptions. No special rules.

But if Jesus would dine with those who seek to trap him and kill him, how much more will he have fellowship with you? Jesus sees a man infected with a disease, a problem this infected man can’t fix, and heals him, despite the fact it’s the Sabbath because he loves him as if he was his own son. Jesus the exalted Son of God cares for the lowly and humbles himself to come down to earth to be amongst the humbled in order to exalt them. Which is why he was dining with these men so they could learn the truth. That’s the difference, we wouldn’t spend time with our enemies, we would never go to their house, we’d assume they poisoned the food or were laying some sort of trap to hurt us. And in this case they were seeking to trap Jesus, but he went anyway. He reclined at their table. He taught them, and cared for the humble, and cared for the Pharisees too, because Jesus is the exalted one who humbles the proud and exalts the lowly. It is in Christ that we see our humble estate, and repent of our sins, and it is in Christ that we are exalted through forgiveness to come back into the presence of God our Heavenly Father. To have a seat at the table of the heavenly banquet, which leads to our second humbling scene.

I personally have always loved assigned seating. I loved it in school, I personally love it for weddings or any other sort of event. If it were up to me, there would always be assigned seating at any dinner party, reception, even the potlucks we’d have for Advent and Lent services. I love assigned seating, it takes all the pressure off of where you will sit. Because when you have to pick where to sit, that’s where the trouble starts. Who gets to sit in the best place? Who has to sit in the worst place? Usually in our lives it’s decided by when you arrive, first come first served, the early bird gets the worm when it comes to seating. But where you sit, or where you think you should sit, shows where you put yourself on that Proud and Humble line we were talking about earlier. Because without assigned seating, you make the call, and if you put yourself in the most prominent place, when there is someone greater than you who is on their way, you will be humbled, and embarrassed, and asked to sit somewhere lower, in this case the lowest place because no one would choose to take that spot and it’s the only one left. Can you imagine anything as embarrassing as sitting at the head table of a wedding and once everyone else is seated, being asked publicly to go sit at the kid’s table so someone else can take your place? Instead imagine if you were in the bridal party and when you came into the wedding reception you sat down at the kid’s table, and someone came and pointed you in the direction of the head table where you were supposed to go? This is what Jesus is showing to us: We are not so proud to think that we deserve the greatest place of honor just because of our greatness. If that is our mindset than we will be humbled and rightfully so, but if in our proper understanding of our sin, we humble ourselves before God, in repentance, in contrition, in sorrow over our sin, it is God who will exalt us of humble estate and put us in a place of prominence because of his love, not because of our actions.

You are invited to the feast. We sing it ourselves don’t we? “This is the Feast of victory for our God?” It’s not a feast that fills the body, it’s a wafer and some wine, but it’s a feast that fills and satisfies the soul because it is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. It’s a feast for the starving spirit of those who see and recognize their humble estate, so much so that they would never think to not receive it, because there is never a time that they are without sin. And you come here to God’s banquet, and we Lutherans can be very good at taking the lowest places, the seats in the back, but you are invited up to the prominent and best place, to kneel at the altar of God, and receive the body and blood of His Son, your Savior Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. You who are humbled are exalted in the presence of God, and there is no greater gift than that, there is no greater peace than to receive from God the one thing needed, forgiveness. And it’s offered here, in God’s house, where you are his guest. Yes you, the enemy of God on account of sin, he invites you here, he welcomes you, despite the traps you may have laid in your heart of unbelief, he still wants you here, to teach you, to care for you, to help you by humbling you, and forgiving you. Because he loves you. He loved these men who sought to kill him, he loved the soldiers who pounded the nails into his hands and his feet, he shows his love in the ultimate humility by becoming a servant and being obedient unto death, even death on a cross for you.

So in the moments you feel proud, where you are special and better than those around you, remember the one who died for you, and compare yourself to his humility so that you are humbled of your proud place. And be a servant, subject to none in regards of what you must do to be saved by your own hands, and subject to all in terms of humble service to your neighbor. That is the opportunity you have to give thanks to God for the gift of his Son who gave his life for you. Humble ones, come and eat, the feast is prepared and be exalted in the presence of God.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.