

Twelfth Sunday of Pentecost/September 1, 2019
Luke 14:1:14/Invitation to the Feast
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“Friend, move up higher.”

Today’s Gospel relates a Sabbath dinner Jesus attended. Pharisees often invited a variety of people to Sabbath dinners to stimulate conversation and debate. There weren’t T.V. talk shows so people sometimes went to see who the rich invited. One member of the community who came this time was a man who had dropsy, a disease where the limbs or body is distended with water because of either liver, cardiac or renal disease.

This man set up a conflict Jesus faced a few times before on other Sabbaths; namely to heal or not. Understand, Pharisees determined healing constituted work and since work was illegal on a Sabbath, healing was also illegal. On the other hand, the crowds viewed this differently. If healing on the Sabbath is a sin, why would God honor that sin by healing the victim?

Jesus met the conflict head on when he challenged the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” The lawyers and Pharisees could only respond with silence. The conflict between their view and the crowd’s rendered them speechless. Jesus healed the man and then pointed out the hypocrisy of the situation. 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?”

The problem many Pharisees had was they were concerned about the outward appearance of keeping the Mosaic Law. Many saw society’s praise as proof they kept the Torah. If they prospered here on earth, then certainly God was pleased with them and He would reward their

good works in the next life. In effect they were trying to work their way into heaven. Something we know is impossible.

Continuing in the narrative, Jesus observed the guests choosing places of honor at the dinner, He saw an opportunity to teach about the true nature of Heaven. He told a parable about people choosing places at a wedding banquet.

The first part of the narrative tells about people who were so arrogant they assumed they deserved a place of honor. When the host comes, he asks these arrogant people to surrender their place to others. They received humiliation as they move to the worst place. Then there are those who humbly wait in the lowest place for the host to assign their places. When the host comes, He honors these humble people by giving them places of honor.

Even if there was no spiritual meaning to this narrative, it makes good sense. After all think of the shame at being demoted in public from a higher place to a lower place. Compared with the honor of being promoted from a lower place to a higher place. This is simply a good rule of etiquette; consider yourself as the least significant person in the room.

As sensible as this parable's earthly meaning is, its spiritual meaning is even deeper. Jesus often compared heaven to a wedding feast. In fact, many times the Bible refers to heaven as an eternal celebration of the wedding of Christ to His bride, the Church. The host at this wedding is, of course, Christ, the groom.

The arrogant guests who take positions higher than their status warrants corresponds to those who believe they deserve a place in heaven by virtue of their own good works. When the host, Jesus Christ, comes to judge the world, he will ask these arrogant guests to

surrender their place to others. They have relied on themselves for their own placement in heaven and so lose their place.

The humble guests who rely on the host to place them are those who understand they deserve nothing but punishment here on earth and forever in eternity. By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit they rely on Jesus Christ to show them to their places. When Jesus returns He will call them friend and give them a place of honor in heaven.

After Jesus spoke to the guests He had a special parable for the host. He said, “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. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

If the parable about choosing places at the wedding banquet makes sense in this world as well as the next, this last parable makes no sense at all in this world. Why would anyone entertain someone who cannot return the favor? Life depends on quid pro quo, cause and effect, payment and repayment. If I do you a favor, you owe me one. That’s how the world operates.

That may be the way the world operates, but it is not how God operates. When God invites guests to His wedding banquet, He invites those who are spiritually poor, crippled, lame, and blind. In fact, He invites those who are spiritually dead; those who have no way in heaven or earth to repay Him. Yes, He invites you and me.

He invites us with the same words He originally gave the Prophets and Apostles; Words they wrote for all generations to come; the

words of Holy Scripture. These words, tell us the invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb did not come without a price. God did not pay the cost of the wedding feast in gold or silver, but through the holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. When we see God made flesh in the manger; when that flesh suffers and dies on the cross; when that flesh lives again in triumph at the resurrection, we see the payment God made so we who are spiritually worse than poor, crippled, lame, or blind are worthy of an invitation to God's wedding feast.

Jesus said, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Nowhere is this statement more deeply fulfilled than in the saving work of Jesus Christ Himself. The Holy Spirit inspired St. Paul to write to the church in Philippi: [Phi 2:5-11] "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus Christ who humbled Himself to the lowest depth of the cross is now exalted to the greatest height. He is now preparing a place of honor for you. He earned a place for each of you at His wedding feast. When the time is right, He will come and say to each of you, His faithful people, "Friend, move up higher."