

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

Luke 14:1-11 One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ² And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. 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. 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. 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."

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 What is below you? What is just too shameful, too humiliating, too low to subject yourself to? Cleaning up others' trash or messes? Giving up a career to tackle the mundane, thankless task of being a mother? Caring for your elderly, at-times-incontinent in-laws? Giving up an evening of carousing with coworkers to accompany your wife on a shopping trip? Cutting your cable bill, opting for a smaller house, a used car, or thrift store clothes, or financing fewer toys to afford the Biblically-mandated tithe? Cleaning toilets? Visiting nursing homes? What fits in that category "I'd do anything else, but not that; it's humiliating"?

2 "Anything but that" was probably the reaction of the Pharisees scrutinizing Jesus' dining advice when He criticized how they chose to seat themselves at the table.

"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.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you." It was nothing new, though. The writer of Proverbs had already noted, "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble" (Prov 25:6-7). It's good social advice to be sure, but it's not merely the sort of pabulum that appears in Miss Manners.

3 Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. But the danger of humility is that you might work too hard at it. In fact, the irony of humility is that if you work at it at all, you're not humble. The most humble people in the world don't know their own humility because they don't care. Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less. If you set out to be more humble, you're done before you start. You don't become more humble by focusing on yourself; that's the problem of the Pharisees. Even their humility is just a show, which Jesus exposes. Good works done so that others will notice you are wicked. Feigned humility so that others will honor you for how humble you are is damnable. Humility is no game to see who can gain the most respect for his humility. Repent. Quit looking at yourself at all. True humility is only concerned with how to serve your neighbor, how to show him honor. True humility would sit at the lowest seat not to get promoted, but so that others would get places of honor.

4 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Jesus is summarizing the psalmist, whom James paraphrases: "God opposes

the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Pride is deadly. To sit in the wrong seat is more than a social faux pas, it’s prideful idolatry. To think highly of yourself, to look at yourself and be fairly satisfied, to think of yourself as a fairly good person is to take the seat of honor. That seat belongs to Christ. If you choose to consider yourself righteous, you’ll be judged based on your own righteousness. And partial honor, partial righteousness cannot earn you this seat. Be perfect, says the One who rightly occupies the seat of holiness, as your Heavenly Father is perfect. If you think highly of yourself, take a closer look at God’s Law. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm? Repent. There is nothing to be proud of. You’re in the wrong seat.

5 The Lord has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly. How? This is the Virgin’s song at the Incarnation, the humbling of the Most Exalted, Jesus Christ, who, though He was in the very form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be held onto, but made Himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. He took the lowest place, the seat of shame and dishonor, took all of humanity’s sinfulness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

6 If the Second Person of the Holy Trinity humbled Himself low enough to become man, the God-man, if nothing was beneath Him, not even the most shameful beating and humiliating death by crucifixion, you have nothing to be proud of but everything for

which to be thankful. Therefore God has highly exalted Him, raised Him from the dead, welcomed Him to His right hand, 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. He who is highly exalted, Jesus Christ, at whose name every knee will bow, has declared to you, "Friend, move up higher."

7 What higher honor can there be than mercy? What greater distinction can there be than forgiveness? He who took your place in Holy Baptism has given you His place. Friend, move up higher. He above whom nothing was took the place below which nothing can be. Because of your false humility, because of your inability to keep even one commandment, because you so desperately needed to hear it, He has declared to you, "I forgive you." Friend, come up higher.

8 To you who never even could have deserved a seat at the table, he bids you, "Friend, come up higher." Take a place in the company of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Take a position in the midst of Moses and the prophets. Pull up a chair in the crowd of the apostles, evangelists, martyrs, angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven. Here you dine on Him who is both Host and Feast. There can be no higher honor than to feast on the Body and Blood of Jesus, which He gives to deliver forgiveness. There can be no higher honor, and there is nothing of which to be proud. Friend, come up higher. There is no place higher than gathered around the Lord's altar.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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