

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, You invite us into Your presence to bless and give to us... but we often neglect You. We do not seek Your face; we do not come into Your house willingly; we often neglect our worship of You, forgive us Lord. Please, continue to call and invite us into Your holy house that we may receive countless blessings from You and the forgiveness that only You can offer. Through our Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke the fourteenth chapter beginning at the first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat

bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. ² And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" ⁴ But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. ⁵ Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" ⁶ And they could not answer Him regarding these things. ⁷ So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: ⁸ "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; ⁹ "and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ "But when you are invited, go and sit

down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Today is Sunday. It is the day of the week that we, as Christians, have predominantly chosen to be our day of worship. It goes back to the earliest of times and the day was chosen for a very simple reason: Sunday is the day on which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

And because of our Savior's resurrection, we now come into the presence of God to receive blessings from Him and to praise His most holy name. Yet, there is one thing that has not been mentioned that we also do in worship... and usually it is the first thing that we do, we confess our sins. We come before God, confess our sins and receive the forgiveness that Christ has secured for us and freely distributes to us through faith. And it is now, through faith, that God invites us and says to us, ***"Friend, Go Up Higher!"***

It happened on one Sabbath that Jesus Christ came into the home of a Pharisee, and a ruler of the Pharisees at that. In that home there was a man who had dropsy. Dropsy was a condition in which excess fluid was produced and would gather in the joints of the body... a most unpleasant way to spend your days. As this man with dropsy approached Jesus, Jesus wanted to take a moment and teach the people, the Pharisees,

who were with Him and so He poses a question ***“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”*** Here was a sick man standing in the midst of the Pharisees, the religious teachers, and Jesus wanted to know what they thought about healing on the Sabbath. Is it okay to heal on the Sabbath? Is it okay to take care of infirmities on the Sabbath? And the Pharisees had no answer.

And we look at those Pharisees and we just shake our heads. With our 24/7 hospitals and Emergency Rooms. With our 24/7 nurses and medical staff. With our 24/7 help lines, we wouldn't understand what it is like to be without help... but I think Jesus had more in mind.

Jesus came into the house of a Pharisee on the Sabbath. The Pharisee was throwing a party on the day of worship. So while the Pharisee, and remember he is a ruler at that, felt it was okay to party and celebrate on the

Sabbath to heal someone was definitely a touchy subject... WHAT? Partying is okay on God's holy day, but to heal someone, to help someone, is questionable? Sure, and it is to this day also.

While God is not a Pharisee, God invites us to come into His house on the Sabbath also... and far too often we want it to be a party instead of a hospital. We come into worship to be entertained and to see a great show and to have a meal and hang out with friends, but far too often we do not come here to be healed. Worship is a time to sing catchy songs, not to sing the liturgy. Worship is a time to hear how great we are, not to hear about our great sin. Worship is a time to know how I can help myself, not hear that only through faith in Christ am I truly healed.

Each and every one of us comes to worship with dropsy and each and every one of us

needs to be healed. As Gerhard says,
“Dropsy corresponds to sin also in that those so afflicted desire to drink ever more water, which only worsens their disease. This is also how it is with sin; the more one indulges in it, the more infirm the soul becomes. It is just like a greedy man forever thirsts for more temporal goods; the more he acquires, the more he thirsts after them - and, thus, the more he alienates himself from the life God has granted to him.”

Doesn't this sound like you? The more you sin, the more you want to sin, and the less you want to be around the only One who can heal you.

However, thanks be to God that He sent His Son into this world to care for each and every one of us. While our dropsy wants and urges us to sin more and more, Jesus Christ came into this world to live a perfect life and to die an innocent death. The only One, ever, who came into this world without sin and

lived without sin, without infirmity, and He came for us. Jesus came to be our Savior, the One who would redeem us from all of our sins.

Jesus came into this world to be our Great Physician. Just as the Bronze Serpent healed in the wilderness, so Jesus Christ heals us. Those who look on Christ, those who have faith in Jesus Christ, have forgiveness of their sins and have eternal life waiting for them.

And now through faith, we come before God constantly to receive countless gifts from Him. When we come into worship, we come to be with our God and to receive from Him. We do not come into worship to give... for what can we give to God. Yet we do, certainly, praise Him for all that He has done but without the forgiveness of our sins, it is impossible to praise God properly. Thus, the reason as to why we come and confess our

sins immediately to our God is so that we can be forgiven and then praise Him.

We come into the presence of God, we confess that we are sinners, that we have spiritual dropsy, and we beg Him to forgive us our sins. And when we come to worship confessing our sins and seeking everything from God... we are humbled. We have shown that we know our sinfulness, we have shown how utterly corrupt we are in that we did not even wish to come to God for the right reasons, we have shown our humility when we admit that we first need forgiveness and the things that only God can offer before we need anything else.

And as we humble ourselves, God will exalt us for that is His promise. When we come before God humbly confessing our sins; when we humbly seek to receive from God our salvation; when we humbly know that only Jesus Christ can save us... then through

faith God will exalt us and He will proclaim, "Friend, Go up higher," go up into His heaven.

And now we see Jesus' parable in a new light. Certainly when we come into worship we come not to give to God and thus to exalt ourselves but we come to the great party of God, worship, in order to sit in the very lowly seat. We come to have the special meal that God has prepared for us, the body and blood of Christ, and when we sit in His house, in humility, God will look down on us and He will walk us up to a higher position.

Maybe that higher position will not be visible in this life, maybe the higher position might mean more trials and thus more reliance on God, maybe the higher position might mean a shorter life than we were planning... but ultimately through faith in

Christ, God will invite us into the truly
'higher place,' His heavenly home.

Dear friends in Christ, each and every one of us is sick. We have a spiritual sickness that when we sin only wants us to sin all the more... but thanks be to God that He has sent His Son, our Savior, our True Physician, into this world to live, die, and rise again for us and thus take away all of our sins. And now through His great love and through the faith that He has given to us, we come into His House to worship Him for all that He has done.

Thanks be to God for curing all of my infirmities. Thanks be to God for sending His Son, the only antidote for my infirmities, into this world to live, die, and rise again for me. And thanks be to God for exalting us and telling each one of us, "***Friend, Go Up Higher!***"

Dear friends, thanks be to God. Amen.