

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.

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." ¹² Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. ¹³ "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. ¹⁴ "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

When you go to a baseball game or football game or basketball game or pretty much any game, where do you try to sit? Do you look for the seats that are the furthest in the back, completely away from the action; far enough

back so that the athletes look like little dots moving around or do you look for seats that are so close to the action that you can actually feel the heat rising off the field, you can see the sweat as the athletes strive to do their best?

Or maybe consider a wedding: when you go to a wedding reception do you seek to sit close to the wedding party or far away from them? And at a wedding reception is not a special table reserved for the wedding party... front and center? And at this table are seated the most “special” of guests: the bride, the groom, the best man, the maid of honor, etc.

And now to provide a little contrast in the introduction of this sermon, when you come to church what are the seats that fill up first? Are the ones right down front completely full so you feel the need to sit further back, or is it almost a punishment to have to sit upfront? Now, no, I am not trying to scold anyone for their choice of seat this morning, but it does offer us a glimpse into Jesus’ parable. Jesus is informing those who hear Him, that it is far better to humble yourself than to exalt yourself

and He does this by noting their seating arrangement. But dear friends, we need to remember that for all that we do... for all that we have done... for all that we will do, we will be *repaid at the resurrection*.

Now we’ve discussed what a parable is previously; it is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. And on this occasion Jesus tells another one of His parables. This parable has to do with where a person chooses to sit down. Jesus notes that those who wish to show off, to exalt themselves choose the best seats so that people can see them and how close they are to the important people and how important they are because of the chair that they occupy. And it is with this first portion of our text that Jesus ends on the note: those who humble themselves will be exalted, and those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

It is sort of interesting though, reading a portion of Scripture like this and getting to see Jesus sarcastic side. Oh, you knew Jesus had a sarcastic side, didn’t you? Look at how He talks to the guests. He is paying attention to how

they all sit and He makes the point that when you come into a dinner or feast you should be sure to take the lowest chair so that way the host can come and make a show of bringing you up to a better place. Then, as Jesus puts it, “you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.” See Jesus is telling us how to get ahead in the world. He is telling the guests at the party that if they really want to get ahead, play humble... for that is the ultimate and heavenly point of Jesus parable, “whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Now, no, Jesus is not telling us to go through our lives playing humble... but how better to reach the Pharisees than with a great picture story they could all relate to. And I would like to do the same with you: Imagine if I made every person in the back row get up and move up to the front because up here they would have more honor. Wouldn't that show that people should sit in the back row, so that I invite them to come forward.. we wouldn't want to sit in the front row unless we are invited up there, because that place holds way too much honor,

right? You see at times, even we are guilty of this sin. And as we all know, “Good Lutherans sit in the back.” Thus all my truly pious and “good” Lutherans are filling in the back pews.

Or maybe we can go back to the introduction. Think about going to a sporting event: which tickets cost the most? Where are the “premium” seats? Once you get away from the skyboxes (because of their TVs, and food, and drink, etc) then we are talking right on the fifty yard line, right behind home plate, right in the action. These are the seats that are most coveted. The seats that are closest and thus... the BEST. And it is interesting, that one commentator noted about this text, “To this day men feast with each other and spare no expense; but for charity and sacred needs - not one cent or a mere pittance.” And sadly I think this is true, still today. We are willing to do any and every thing for the best seats to a sporting event or to a wedding reception or to anything... but when it comes to God, we are not always willing to do everything. We are not always willing to put in the time and effort for God. And again this is not about sitting in the back pew or the front

pew, this is about the notion that there is a best, and so often in the world we strive for the best, but in church we are okay with “good enough.” And I have to ask, are you okay with “good enough?” And then with that in mind... are you humble? I mean the point of Jesus’ parable today was to make sure that each and every one of us would humble ourselves. So again, are you humble?

Do you seek out the lesser things of this world to be closer to God? Do you humble yourself around your fellow man to show your Father’s love for you? Do you seek out the “lesser” things of the world (bread, wine, water, words), so that you can have the most exalted relationship with God ever?

See, being humble is a difficult concept in this world. We see so much hoopla surrounding athletes and millionaires and billionaires, that at times we can get caught up in it too. We can want some of that exaltation from the world to come our way... and yet exaltation from the world is not any exaltation that we should strive for.

As Lenski tells us, “It was this worldly pride of the Jews, this unspiritual holiness superiority of the Pharisees especially, that made them despise a Messiah who was as humble as Jesus was.” The Jews of Jesus day, especially the Pharisees loved the pomp and circumstance surrounding themselves and their leaders... but Jesus was not that way. Jesus was born in a lowly manger. He was born to a virgin and a carpenter. He was raised in a little backwoods town of Nazareth. When He grew up, He travelled around with His disciples, never wanting fanfare. When he healed people, He constantly sent them to the priests and Levites... to the Temple to be right with God, not man. Jesus led a very humble life. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” And Jesus did die. He died the death of the worst of sinners, though He was sinless. He died so that each and every one of us would have eternal life. Paul continues, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every

name.” And after three days, Jesus rose from the dead and proclaimed the victory He had won, over the world, over sin, and over Satan. And the name of Jesus is still above any and all other names.

And so it is with His followers. Jesus is not looking for people to be falsely humble, He does not want false humility. Jesus wants true believers in Him... which when we believe that there is nothing we can do for our salvation, when we believe we are wholly dependent on Jesus Christ, when we know that we are sinners... we cannot be more humble. As Lenski notes, “With God only genuine humility counts, which neither pushes itself forward nor cunningly schemes to get itself pushed forward; and this God invariably rewards, perhaps already in this world, but surely in the next.”

Dear friends in Christ, being humble is not something that comes naturally to us. In fact, when we are born we think that the world only revolves around us and our needs... and throughout life we can constantly be fed that notion. Hear the words of Christ as He tells you

to help those in need around you who cannot repay you: the lame, blind, crippled, poor. We need to be humble and realize that there is no reward in showing off flashy things and expecting a return. Our reward is in helping those who need help and who cannot repay. As Luther says, “Charity and necessity must be the norms of all laws; and there should be no law that should not be bent and interpreted according to love; if there be, it should be abrogated, though an angel from heaven had made it. And all this serves for the purpose that our hearts and consciences be strengthened thereby. Then, also, the Lord teaches us how we shall humble ourselves and subject ourselves to others.” What an excellent point Dr. Luther makes. We should humble ourselves and become subject to others... exactly like Jesus was explaining in His parable. Not falsely like the Pharisees and others were doing, but truly... going about our life humbly and if we are exalted here, praise God. And when we are exalted and brought into heaven, THANK GOD!

It's funny... this sermon has a theme of "repaid at the resurrection." It almost implies that God owes us something... yet He owes us nothing. However, when Jesus makes the claim, that we will be repaid at the resurrection, for showing humility and love toward God, that is something we can take to heart and know is true. God has promised us that we will be repaid at the resurrection, not for our pride, not for our vanity, not for our love of the world... we will be repaid for our humility: for caring for the less fortunate, for being there for someone who needs a shoulder to cry on... for showing the love of God. We will be repaid, not because of what we have done, not because of what we may do... but solely because of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us. Friends, we have been repaid and we continue to receive that repayment every day of our lives in the blessings that God showers upon us and that one day He will shower upon us in heaven.

Thanks be to God. Amen.