**Luke 14:1-14 (ESV)**

**1** 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.” **12** He said also to the man who had invited him, “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. **13** But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, **14** and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

**“Humbled By His Humility”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Seats matter and I suppose this is true because once you sit down your legs are no longer useful. Many kinds of responses come about from where we sit. There is that questionable doubt over whom you will have to sit next to at a wedding reception. There is that feeling of disgust when a purchased ticket at a major event ended up sticking you in nosebleed section. There is that weariness at school with how close the assigned seating puts you to the teacher. There is even that momentary shock over someone else sitting in your church pew. Seats matter, as we can also see from our Gospel reading from St. Luke.

A ruler of the Pharisees had made a place for Jesus to eat at his home. To dine together on the Sabbath was truly an event in itself. It puts going out to eat after church at a whole other level. Of course, the friendly invitation to Jesus had a hidden agenda. Pharisees were always trying to find a way to trap Him. St. Luke makes it clear right from the start, “they were watching him carefully.” This is that kind of pins and needles circumstance that few people ever enjoy. However, Jesus knew what He was in for, but still went out of love. His mission from the Father was to seek and save the lost, even the worst kind of frauds. The question begging for an answer was, though, was “who was inviting who?” In great humility, Jesus has made a place for you at His table.

The Pharisees had room enough only for themselves. They were unable to reply to God’s demand for love. There were plenty of Sabbath rules, but a man with swollen limbs did not appear to have a place among those rules. Jesus without hesitation asked them, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” The Pharisee asked this same question earlier about a man with a wither hand. Their goal was to find a way to accuse Jesus. His goal here was to have them confess the depths of the laws demands to show mercy. Somehow they skipped what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy saying, “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again” (22:4). No response came to either question posed by Jesus because it jeopardized their system. The law was simply a tool to serve personal interest and not finally showing the truth of man’s lack of love. This corruption infects us. We protect our pharisaical systems that look so good. St. Paul does not let us off the hook saying, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10).

As much as the Pharisees were “closely watching” Jesus, he also was watching them. St. Luke notes, “Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor…” Rather than the Law doing the work of calling to repentance, they were going about a personalized seating chart. Jesus saw through this self-gratifying arrangement among sinners. As the Son of God, He knows that man by nature is on a quest for glory. It happened with Adam and Eve in the garden before God. It was happening before Jesus with the Pharisees. It happens still today in new kinds of pharisaical dreams. Rather than God coming to raise up the humbled with His forgiveness, we have debates over who is more loving. This self-glorifying is a standard of the world. Yet, when it seeps into the church, worse than worshiping works of the Law is how it twists the Gospel. God sees this quest for glory over a new kind of love. It means Jesus is present, but nobody is a sinner, none need to repent. All have a place of honor in whatever way they want to live. When the fact remains only God as Savior can say to sinners, “Friend, move up higher.”

Jesus knew the host, the ruling Pharisee, was the most to benefit from this gathering. This man made the arrangements and counted on maybe even gaining something by inviting Jesus. However, he saw it in terms of what was to be good and profitable for this life. While the Son of God said, “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. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Better things come by God’s promises and not by works designed for our benefit. Except, who admits with joy that my loss is someone else’s gain? Works are what make the difference in what we see. Hard work is what built this country. If there is not works, what else is there for comfort? Yet, St. Paul tells us, “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse…” (Galatians 3:10). If works were so secure, rewarding, and fair our Lutherans Fathers would not have declared, “Consciences cannot be set at rest through any works, but only by faith, when they take the sure ground that for Christ’s sake they have a gracious God” (AC XX).

Where the Pharisees only had room enough for themselves, Jesus has room enough to save sinners. He is not troubled to see the least. Like the man with dropsy, Jesus sees the swollenness of our sinful life. It does not pose a threat because His love comes as the perfect fulfillment of the Law. Rather than the last person considered at the table, sinners are the first ones Jesus sees to give good news. As St. Luke wrote, “Then he took him and healed him and sent him away.” How quickly does the Gospel go to work. Jesus takes our troubles into Himself. He heals the sins that weigh us down. He sends us away with the blessings of His love. This is the invitation of a true Sabbath where God’s loving service is to us by His Word. Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29). None needs the false love of the Pharisees that has nothing to say. Christ changes the picture so the love we speak to others is the love He first has spoken to us.

If all the good seats seem taken, it might mean we are missing the kingdom of Christ. He is not ashamed to see His place of honor on the cross. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Try as we may, none is humbler than Him who loved us. Jesus is the Savior who gladly suffers and dies. The Son of God has nothing to glorify but His sacrifice for that alone is the Gospel. Nothing else proves the love that God gives to save the lost. Jesus still humbly extends this out in the sacrament of His true body and blood. The meal where feuding disciples first fought that night over glory while Jesus went about being the servant. Has now come into the light of the cross giving glory to His words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.” What came with humiliation the Father has exalted in His Son. What came with shameful judgment God has accepted as true righteousness for sinners. What was sadness God now gives with celebration over Christ as our victory against all sin, death, and the Devil.

People are all about benefits that come from work. Yet, Jesus gains nothing for Himself by His sacrifice. He is not disappointed because He sees the heavenly blessing for all who trust in Him. It is an invitation to take a seat in His kingdom. You have a place as the crippled, lame, and blind because the faithfulness of Jesus cannot fail. The writer from Hebrews proclaims, “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” There is nothing to lose, not in terms of what the Pharisee sees, but in the promise Jesus makes for sinners. He says, “Friend, come up here.” Baptism does wash away all sin joining you to me. My Word does speak forgiveness to reconcile you to God and each other. My Supper holds the abundance of what I offer of an eternal home. Let us be humble about works, but not with Him who loves us. In great humility, Jesus has made a place for you at His table. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.