

September 1, 2013
Pentecost 15

"The Humbled Are Exalted"

LUKE 14:1, 7-14

On *One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." ¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

I am holding in my hand a bolt and a nut. If I want to attach the nut to the bolt I turn it to the right and eventually it will thread itself on the bolt. Even little children know the right way turn a nut or screw because of the saying, "Righty tighty and lefty loosey." If you take the blade off your lawn mower to have it sharpened, you may discover that the way to turn the bolt loose is the very opposite. It is counter intuitive. The formula is "righty loosey and lefty tighty."

God's plan for saving us is totally counter intuitive to our natural way of thinking. Your automatic default position is to believe that you can exalt yourself in the eyes of God by trying to be a better person. As one lady said when it came to going to heaven: "I'll try and do my best and hope in luck for all the rest." Jesus speaks to us today and tells us it is totally the opposite in the kingdom of God. Those who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

The humbled are exalted in Christ

Jesus spent a lot of time with a group of ultra religious people called the Pharisees. "One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched." The Pharisees were very good at exalting themselves both publicly and privately. Have you ever seen a rooster crow? These people were always crowing about how good they were. They despised others for not looking as good as they did.

Why would Jesus even accept an invitation to the home of a prominent Pharisee, someone who was the best at crowing how good he was? Jesus wanted these people in his kingdom just as much as the tax collectors and sinners, just as much as he wants people like you

and me. It says that Jesus "was being carefully watched." They were not watching Jesus to see the evidence he was true God, or to see in him a love and kindness no human being had every shown. These people watched Jesus to see if he would heal people on the Sabbath day. They wanted to accuse him of breaking their man made Sabbath laws and human traditions.

Do you ever fall into this sin of watching other people and thinking evil of them? The other day I picked up some Baja fillets at Spencer's Market. I chose the line that was the shortest. That was a big mistake. The elderly lady in front of me was trying to pay for her item with exact change buried in the bottom of her purse. Her struggle to find the right change seemed to take forever. Perhaps you have lost your patience in situations such as this. Maybe you have even thought bad thoughts of that person because you were so much better than they are at finding the coins in the bottom of your purse. I looked at her and thought of my mother and father in their last years of life, taking extra time to talk to the clerk and fumbling to find the right change. Someday that will be one of us. Someone will lose patience with us and have bad thoughts about us. She turned to me and said, "I am sorry for taking so long." I smiled and said, "That's OK."

Why is it that people persevere on the faults and weakness of other people? Why do they gossip at the work place? Why do they judge people by how they talk, or how much money they have or even by the color of their skin? It was not that long ago when there were drinking fountains in the South that had signs on them, "For Whites Only." There is this awful nasty Pharisee that lurks inside of each of us. It wants to lead us down a path where we delight in exalting ourselves. In the late 1800's the famed evangelist Dwight Moody was walking with a friend on the streets of Chicago. They walked past a man who was lying in the gutter filthy and drunk. The friend said with self righteous disdain in his voice, "Isn't that disgusting!" Moody responded, "Here by the grace of God go I."

To lead Pharisees to repentance, Jesus told the story of a proud Pharisee who went up to the temple to pray: "God I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and gave a tenth of all I get." Jesus was a master at telling stories that revealed the depth of corruption in the human heart. He wants the proud and self righteous people of every age to humble themselves before God and find forgiveness and peace in him.

Jesus noticed how the Pharisees who came to this meal carefully picked out the seats of honor at the meal. They wanted lots of attention. Jesus told them a story about going to a wedding banquet to illustrate the corruption that exists in every human heart. If someone invites you to a wedding feast, don't take the place of honor. If you do, someone more honored than you may be invited to take your place. How embarrassing that would be in front of all the wedding guests! Instead when you enter the wedding celebration take a place in the back of the room. Then when the host notices you sitting in the back and invites you to move up to a better seat you will be honored in the presence of all the people who are there.

I mulled over these words of Jesus this past week. What is he trying to tell us here? Does he want us to be manipulative and clever and take a lower seat with the hope of getting a higher seat? No, our Lord Jesus knows how to expose the corruption in our hearts and the selfish pride that lurks there. Everything inside of us says, "It won't work if I take a

lower seat. Nobody will notice me anyone. Why should I risk humbling myself?" Imagine telling a Hollywood star to just dress in plain clothes for the Oscar awards or to take a seat up in the balcony instead of the front row seat was awarded. They would rather die than suffer such a humiliation.

When it comes to the kingdom of God you want to be humiliated. That is why Jesus applies these words to us by saying, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." God's Word has a way of humbling us. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes his life: "This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

We once had the opportunity to read through portions of the book of Romans with a highly regarded Hispanic doctor in Santa Barbara. He was looking for answers in his life. We read the sweeping condemnation of all humanity found in Romans 3. "There is no one righteous, not even one... The poison of vipers is on their lips.. Their feet are swift to shed blood... There is no fear of God before their eyes.... After each statement he interrupted and said with tears in his eyes, "That's me! That's me!" What a privilege it was to share with this broken and humbled man the righteousness which was his in Christ alone.

We come before God this morning we tears in our eyes as we humbly confess with the tax collector who came to pray in the temple, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "Lord, have mercy on me! Christ, have mercy on me!"

You have nothing to offer God that can move him to be merciful to you. God has everything to offer you. He gives you Jesus and his righteousness. As we sang in our hymn last Sunday, "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress, Helpless look to thee for grace." In Christ, and Christ alone you have the exalted position of being a new creation, the beautiful bride of Christ, members of the body of Christ, Sons of God. Look at where you are sitting this morning. You aren't in some back corner of the room. You aren't sitting in the nose bleed seats. Through Jesus you are sitting at the head table next to him as his beloved bride. You, who are humbled by your sin, listen to these words and treasure how exalted you are in Christ: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

The humbled want others to be exalted in Christ

When you are richly blessed in Christ you long to share these riches with people who don't have what you have. Jesus tells us, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

It is an honor to share the blessings you have with other people who don't have what you have. The greatest honor is to offer someone who has been humbled by their sin the complete pardon and forgiveness in Christ. Because you are joyfully wearing Christ's robe of righteousness this morning, you want people who are still in the rags of their

unrighteousness to be blessed as you blessed. You want them to be exalted and lifted up from their lost condition just as it was with you.

Jesus is not going to walk the streets of this city to bring this blessing to other. He is not going to send angels to do this for us. He is depending on you and me to do this. Right within our circle of friends, and neighbors and family members we have people who are desperately poor and in need of Jesus. We are humbled by this honor we have to share with them this highly exalted positioned we have in Christ.

May the Holy Spirit bless your week as you meditate on God's amazing grace that takes people who are humbled by their sin and exalts them in Christ. Amen.