

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
26 September, Anno Domini 2021
St. Luke 14:1-11
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We need to take very seriously Jesus' warning at the house of the Pharisee. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Jesus says these words because He knows each and every one of our hearts. He knows how filled with pride and self-promotion we all are. If that weren't true, no one would sin. At the heart of all sin lies pride - the belief that we are more than what we actually are, that we are like God, the authors and arbiters of what is good and evil. We covet what isn't given to us because we believe we have a rightful claim to it. We chase after compliments and praise, longing for someone to notice us because we think we're worthy of it. We neglect prayer, hold grudges, and turn our eyes away from our neighbor's need because we want everyone's eyes on us.

All who dare to stand before the judgment seat of Christ puffing out their chest and treating others with contempt will be humbled, they will be brought to utter ruin and shame as they are cast into the outer darkness. For such a person has no use for God or the mercy that He has shown in Jesus. That person believes God to simply be a divine spectator, watching from the sidelines to see who outperforms everyone else - who gains the most friends, who is able to maintain the most lavish lifestyle, who amasses the most wealth and the most stuff, who does the best job creating the lifestyle they most desired.

And while the Lord hates such vile pride, we must also be aware that pride can hide behind a false humility as well. Our Lord is no more interested or fooled by shows of humility that are put on in the hopes of being noticed, than He is in outright pride. He sees behind our boasting of the sacrifices we've made, the hours we've put in, the cost we've born, the hardship we've endured.

Pride assumes that you have to be something, that you can be something. Pride takes credit for possessions and abilities and blessings that were never earned but given as a gift. Both kinds of pride betray the thoughts and desires of the heart. Both are rooted in a desire for attention and the vain notion that the purpose of life

is to be important. We attempt to find meaning and purpose in the applause of those around us.

Just look at how many young people are desperate to be “influencers”, to have everyone looking at them, oohing and aahing over how beautiful they are, how fashionably dressed they are, how many likes and followers they have, how many places they’ve been around the world. And this desperate need to remain popular and in front of peoples’ eyes drives them to go to any length, no matter how degraded and perverse it may, just to make sure you’re still watching. And our obsession with these people feeds their pride as well as our own as we long for what they seem to have. Children don’t think about being useful to their neighbor. They want to be famous. They want everyone to know their name. And how often have we indulged and encouraged them in this self-destructive fantasy rather than showing them who they are in Christ?

We must all repent. We have all sought the chief seat at the table in our homes, in our church, in our jobs, in our classrooms. We have tried to crawl higher on the backs of others, tearing down their reputations, exploiting their weaknesses, acting as though we are better, smarter, more self-controlled, more righteous. Rather than stretching out our hand in mercy to pick up the fallen, we reach and pat ourselves on the back for not having been so foolish as they.

True humility can only come from knowing ourselves rightly and we can only know that when we are first made aware of the malignant pride that resides within our flesh. The Holy Spirit, like a pure fire, must illuminate and burn up the vanity and arrogance that consume our hearts and minds. In the mirror of the Ten Commandments the truth is revealed back to us that we really have nothing to be prideful about. We are rebellious toward God, seeking to sit on His throne for ourselves. We are loveless toward our neighbor, begrudging his good and withholding mercy in his time of need. The Law reveals that even our humility is not pure. It is tainted with pride and deceit.

Only when we can acknowledge these things, that there is nothing good within us worthy of praise nor even the capability to produce something good, only then can there be true healing and forgiveness. Then we can know ourselves rightly and find healing in Christ. Christ doesn’t need you to be something. He doesn’t need you to accomplish great things. He has made you and He will accomplish His purposes in and through you according to His gracious will. It is His good and gracious will that needs to be done, not your sinful will. This is to His glory, not yours. The Lord who humbled Himself to take your flesh and suffer the wrath of

God for you, is to be your true and only glory. It is in Him and Him alone that we can boast because He has done all things well. He has taken the lowest seat of the servant so that you might be brought up to the highest seat, the seat of sons and daughters of the Most High God. This is to your benefit, not His.

And thus, while you shouldn't think more highly of yourself than you ought, you are also not to debase yourself and think of yourself less than you ought. You are a baptized and redeemed child of God. You wear the royal robe of Christ's righteousness. God was no more pleased with monks like young Luther who whipped and starved themselves trying to purge themselves and show the depths of their sorrow, than He was with the Pharisee who took pride in his obedience. Both are rejections of the mercy of God in Christ. Both refuse to believe that God freely and gladly forgives the sins of those who repent.

True humility, then, is not simply horror over your sin. It must also be accompanied by faith in the promise that God has taken your sin from you and raised you up. It is faith that the punishment that was laid upon the Lamb was sufficient. When we seek to punish ourselves for our guilt or wallow in our guilt as though true faith is defined by walking around in perpetual sorrow, we deny the Holy Absolution of the one whose Blood was poured out for that guilt, as though it wasn't enough. It was enough. It will always be enough. You are not Lord or Savior. But you are the redeemed of the One who is. You are no less than heirs of the eternal kingdom of God.

Let us therefore, put to death our sinful pride, rightly humble ourselves, and place all confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ who, for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame, that He might say to us "Dear friends, move up higher, and receive the kingdom that has been prepared for you."

In the Name of +Jesus.

(Please stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding, keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.