

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 14:1-11

27 September, Anno Domini 2026

Beloved exalted of God,

The most grotesque and disturbing thing about the account of Christ's healing of the man with dropsy wasn't the man before Jesus whose body was swollen with water, a condition known today as edema. It was the Pharisees' silence brought about by their hearts which were swollen with pride. The Greek word which is translated most often as "remained silent" carries with it an attitude of refusal rather than sheer inability which is the case after Jesus' second and rhetorical question about rescuing sons and donkeys on the Sabbath. The pride and self-righteousness of the Pharisees, their demonic need to be right and better than others, gave birth to a hideous hatred of both Jesus and the man afflicted with dropsy. Jesus wasn't even expecting that they should have healed the man. He only wanted to know if the Divine Law, which clearly states "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:8-11), also forbade helping your neighbor who was suffering the ravages of sin. But the Pharisees cared nothing for their suffering neighbor. "Why should I help him, when I could instead, put another notch in my own righteousness belt? What self-control and humility I could demonstrate before heaven and earth if having the power to help this man in any way, I restrained myself because it was the Sabbath! It's truly a shame that my neighbor is hungry or in pain or blindly walking down the broad path that leads to eternal damnation. But that is his own problem. The Law says no work on the Sabbath and I have worked too hard to prove my righteousness to God to mess that up for this guy who probably was afflicted with this because of his own sin."

The Pharisees would only help such a person if they believed it would increase their own righteousness and standing before God. Their neighbor was nothing more than a stepping stone by which they could exalt themselves in their own eyes and the eyes of those around them. Have you ever heard or maybe even said something like "It feels good to help others."? Should it matter how it feels? What if it doesn't feel so good to show mercy to your neighbor? The man with dropsy wasn't a neighbor - he was just a pawn in the Pharisees' designs to destroy the Lord and

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prove once and for all that God is not a forgiver of sins who desires that all men be saved from eternal judgment, but an exacting tyrant who despises the poor and lowly and the despised and loves those who are right in their own eyes and insist on their rights; those who will not approach in mercy and humility those who have hurt them or done them wrong until their own pre-determined terms of justice and recompense are met.

Dear children, how often do we find these thoughts in our own hearts? How often do we see our neighbor or even our Christian brother and sister drowning, either because of their sin or simply because they are suffering the general curse of sin and death, and we remain silent, not because we are unable to help but because we refuse to, because our pride and self-righteousness won't stand for it? How often is our so-called mercy stunted or distorted or cut off completely because we are guarding our own egos or sense of justice? By silencing mercy so that the Law can be kept, we seek the higher seat at the wedding feast. We think God is impressed with justice. We exalt ourselves, our opinions, our thoughts, our ideas about how things should be done, our feelings, our priorities, and our schedules over and against the needs, the weaknesses, the failings, the sins, and the struggles of our neighbor.

Repent. The God who thundered from Mt. Sinai in giving the Law is the same God who brought proud Pharaoh to his knees and his grave and brought down might Nebuchadnezzar after using him to punish Judah, is also the God who chose stuttering Moses to bring His people out of bondage, who chose the shepherd boy David to rule over Israel, who chose Mary to be the His mother, and humbled Himself to take on human flesh to suffer the shame of the cross, all to save you from the death which your pride justly deserved. Does not Mary say in the Holy Spirit "He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts; He has brought down the might from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate" (Luke 1:48, 51-52)

The eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, who confess without reservation that they are nothing and deserve nothing good from God, and who hope in His mercy; who rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ who has looked upon their wretched state, filled and swollen as they were with sin, and had compassion on them. Instead of turning away in contempt and disgust, the Lord God had compassion on them by willingly being filled with their sin and being crushed under God's wrath in their place. God's great eagerness to be restored to us and united to us meant

that He was glad and willing to lay aside all His rights and be counted among sinners. He who alone is clean and spotless and holy and pure and commanded His people to avoid what is unclean, Himself became the most unclean of all things, bearing all the filth and impurity of our sinful wretched pride which pours out in greed and jealousy and gossip and backbiting and words that tear others down in hopes of building up ourselves. The God of heaven and earth who has every legal right to eternally condemn us, went silently as a lamb to the slaughter - He could have asserted His rights. He could have shamed His accusers by the Law. He could have called down legions of angels to rescue Him from our stupidity and madness. He refused. He remained silent, not to avoid showing mercy, but because mercy demanded it. Mercy for you and me, rescue from eternal shame and degradation and death, required Jesus stop remain silent as our guilt was unjustly laid upon Him. he who had every right to be exalted and counted innocent and set free, instead has set us free by humbling Himself to the point of death on the cross, with the sins of the whole world bound to Him. His shame is our glory. His death is our boasting. His cross is our joy. By His Blood, Blood that we will drink this very day, He has brought us poor, miserable, prideful sinners near to God, cleansing us of sins and presenting us to His Father as spotless, holy, pure, and beautiful. This is precisely why the Sabbath was instituted - so that we might humbly lay aside any pride and draw near in repentance to the God who freely forgives those who could never hope to deserve such a thing. This day, the Lord Jesus has drawn near to us to heal us by absolving us of the loathsome disease of sin that would bring us into eternal death. You are not a pawn or a stepping stone or even an inconvenience. You, beloved Baptized, are children of God who have been given the true Sabbath rest of the forgiveness of all your sins - not because you are so great but because God is so merciful.

And having been freely restored and united to God through the humble death of God's Son, you have also been united to one another. With the whole Christian Church in heaven and on earth, you share a common Lord, a common faith, a common salvation, and common baptism, a common Father who alone is over all and through all and in all. There can be no place, then, among us for one exalting himself over another. Whether I have offended or received offense, the response is the same - I must humble myself before God and then before my brother and do everything in my power to maintain our unity in Christ. It doesn't matter if I am clearly right and my brother clearly wrong. Does not the Holy Spirit say "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness"? (Galatians 6:1) Jesus was entirely right, but for the sake of Judas and Caiaphas and Pilate and you and me, He humbled Himself precisely so that we didn't get what we deserve.

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Undoubtedly, humility requires great sacrifice - sacrifice of ego and pride and rights and comfort and ease. Sometimes it requires sacrifice of goods and reputation and even your life. But to all who truly humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, who humble themselves before their neighbors, who walk according to Christ's call to take up their cross and follow Him in the way of humility, the Divine promise is clear - God Himself will exalt you and give you a seat at the wedding feast of His Son, Holy Communion, where every seat is a seat of honor. Here, none is before or after another, none is greater or lesser than another. All are alike before Him who is the highest who is before you as the one who serves.

May the Holy Spirit fill each of our hearts with true humility after the likeness of our Savior that without concern to any personal cost we may strive with all eagerness to maintain our unity in Christ which He has bestowed upon us again this Sabbath Day by His great and undeserved mercy. God grant it for Jesus' sake.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.