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Christ the King Lutheran Church – Cody, WY
Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
October 1, 2023
Text: Luke 14:1–11

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

According to today's gospel reading, Jesus received an invitation to eat dinner at the house of a ruling member of the Pharisees. We don't know why this particular ruling Pharisee invited Jesus to his dinner party. We do know the ruling Pharisee and his guests "were watching Jesus carefully" (vs. 1). We also know this isn't the first dinner party our Lord has had with the Pharisees. As you may know, the Pharisees were a very prominent and influential group of Jewish religious leaders during our Lord's earthly ministry. Luke recorded two other dinner parties before the one in Luke 14. These two parties would have been in different locations and with different people than the one in chapter 14. But they are all part of the same religious group called the Pharisees.

The first party is described in chapter 7. On that occasion, a prostitute came to the party uninvited. She brought a flask of ointment. She washed Jesus' feet with her tears and hair and then anointed His feet with the ointment. It was an extravagant, beautiful act of love and devotion. She was a sinner who had sinned much. In Christ, however, she experienced forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration.

The Pharisee watched this and said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner" (vs. 39). Jesus pointed out to the entire dinner party that the Pharisee had not shown Jesus the most basic forms of courtesy expressed in those days. He gave no water for Jesus' to wash His feet, no kiss of greeting, no ointment for his head. But this woman provided tears and ointment for His feet, and she kissed them in love and devotion. Jesus told

the guests she had sinned much but was forgiven for she loved much. They, however, did not love much nor were they forgiven their sins. The sinful woman, however, heard Jesus say, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (7:50).

The second dinner party with the Pharisees is described in chapter 11. Jesus didn’t wash His hands like the Pharisees thought He should. Our Lord responded to the Pharisee’s criticism by saying, “Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it” (11:44). You Pharisees are the walking dead, defiling everyone you come into contact with. You guys are so concerned about washing hands and such things that you have forgotten about repentance, faith, love, trust, and living lives that reflect God’s glory in humility.

Religious lawyers, experts in Mosaic law, were also present at this second party. One of them spoke up and said, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also” (vs. 45). Our Lord didn’t back down nor did He apologize. To them, He pronounced a series of three woes: woe to you for burdening the consciences of God’s people, woe to you for supporting the murder of God’s prophets, woe to you for taking away the key of saving knowledge (11:46–52). Luke does not record any word of grace or love or forgiveness being spoken. There was no repentance, and no faith.

The ruling Pharisee and the guests of Luke 14 have probably heard about these previous events. Consequently, they “were watching [Jesus] carefully” (vs. 1). Our Lord was surrounded by men who would like nothing more than to trap Him in some misspoken word or error in judgment. And wouldn’t you know it, a man with dropsy suddenly appears. This has the feel of a set-up. Dropsy is probably the disease we call edema – a disorder causing water retention in the body often resulting in extreme pains felt throughout the body especially in the joints and ligaments. The swelling often led to severe disfigurement.

According to OT laws, a man with dropsy was unclean, an outcast in Jewish society. This is another test to see what Jesus will do. If Jesus doesn't offer to help this poor soul, the Pharisees can accuse our Lord of being calloused and merciless to the poor and needy. If He heals the afflicted man, the Pharisees can accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath.

In verse 3, Jesus asked a question of the Pharisees and lawyers, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" The Third Commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8). What does the 3rd Commandment say about a man diseased with dropsy?

Notice the Lord's question, "Is it lawful to *heal*...?" The man with dropsy doesn't require work but healing. This is a matter of love and compassion not of work. If the question was to build a patio deck or put in some overtime on the Sabbath rather than rest in God's Word, Jesus would certainly have responded differently. But this is a flesh and blood human man needing love and compassion, not laws, regulations, and frivolous debate.

The ruling Pharisee and his legal friends look rather silly and they know it, hence the silence (vs. 4). Jesus healed the man with dropsy and sent him home complete and whole (vs. 5). The Sabbath is about loving God through faith alone and loving man through good deeds and charity. And to make sure the Pharisee and his guest get the point, Jesus asked a simple question with an obvious answer, "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?" (vs. 5). Of course they would, without any hesitation. That man with dropsy is worth more love and attention than an ox!

One point of application is that everyone is invited to hear the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus calls all men, women, and children to repent of their sins and to turn to Him in faith. No one is disqualified from hearing God's Word. Otherwise, none of us could come to Christ. For all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. But Jesus comes to us in our need to redeem us, to make us new and whole. This is why we tell everyone about Jesus. And

why we invite them to worship services and Bible studies. One of the greatest expressions of love we can share is to tell someone about God's redeeming love in Christ. And then share that love with one another through word and deed in Christ's name.

Once the diseased man leaves, people began to take their places. Jesus noticed that the guests begin to jockey for position around the table. Everyone wants to sit to the right or the left of the host as these are the places of honor; no one is interested in being the least and last.

Once again, our Lord takes the lead and warns them that such arrogant actions may in fact lead to humiliation when you are asked to give up your spot in front of everyone else (vs. 8-9). Jesus warned them that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (vs. 11).

Our Lord's instructions here aren't about social etiquette, table manners, or avoiding embarrassing situations. He is teaching us about Himself and life in His kingdom. Jesus is the enfleshed Son of God. The glorious, majestic Son of God willingly left His Father's right hand in glory, the highest place of honor, in order to become the least and the last of all humanity. The Lord Jesus took upon Himself every form of human sin and degradation and took them to His cross. On Calvary, Jesus endured the Father's wrath against our sins. Jesus shed His blood to make atonement for them. He died the death we all deserve. The Greatest, Jesus, became the least and the last.

Three days later, on Easter morning, the Father exalted His humble Son by raising Him from the dead. And then 40 days after Easter, Jesus ascended to the Father's right in glorious majesty and splendor having secured salvation and victory for His beloved people. All who believe in Him as their Savior will join Him at the Father's right hand. Jesus' teaching in vs. 11, "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" is grounded in His own ministry. Jesus humbled Himself and was exalted by the Father.

This pattern of humility and then exaltation is embedded into the very fabric of Christ's Church. We come to Jesus as the least and the last; like the prostitute at the first dinner party and like this man with dropsy in today's gospel reading. Both of them, the least and the last, heard words of grace, forgiveness, love, salvation. The humble were exalted. But the Pharisees and lawyers, the first and greatest, were humbled – cast down – by divine rebuke and judgment.

All of these events and teachings from our Lord's ministry are recorded for us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that we can know rightly who we are, who Jesus is, and what He has done to redeem us. Each and every Sunday – really everyday of our lives – we come to Jesus as the least and the last; we make no claims, invoke no rights, and make no promises of paying the Lord back for anything. We come to His feast of life and salvation sitting in the low places only to find that Christ singles us out and invites us to move up and sit with Him in the place of honor. We receive a foretaste of Christ's heavenly feast every time we hear His Word, believe it in faith, consume our Lord's body and blood in the Holy Supper, and respond with prayer and praise.

The least and the last being exalted by Christ to highest seats of honor, this is what life in God's kingdom is all about. This is what life in the Church is all about – feasting in the presence of Christ, rejoicing forever in the forgiveness of sins, trusting in the gracious exaltation our Lord gives to the humble. Glory be to Jesus.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.