

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 17 – September 22, 2024
Luke 14:1-11 – Humble Yourself
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's theme is humility. Humble yourself. As Solomon says in Proverbs 25, "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble."

And as Paul says in Ephesians 4, "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience."

And as Jesus himself says in Luke 14, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Humble yourself. Scripture teaches this simple truth again and again. 1 Peter 5, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

In Luke chapter 1, the Virgin Mary rejoices in God her Savior with magnificent humility in the Magnificat. And the book of Proverbs is full of warnings against pride, it's dripping with wise instruction in humility.

But humility has become far too rare in America today. It especially seems to be rare among our leaders and politicians. In fact, many Americans seem to consider humility a sign of weakness. No one wants to apologize and admit they were wrong. Everyone digs in to deny and deny and cast the blame on others. And if people finally do apologize, what we usually hear is, "I'm sorry you were offended," or "I'm sorry I got caught," rather than, "I'm sorry for what I did."

Let it not be so in the church. For we have been taught that humility is great in the eyes of God. His power is made perfect in weakness. We are to submit to one another in love and outdo one another in showing honor, for the least among us will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

And here in the church, we meet the one man who truly exemplifies humility. The Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who humbled himself, and he is the one who is exalted. Jesus took the lowest seat. Although from eternity he shared all honor and glory with his Father, he became man. He hid his glory under the form of a servant. God himself ate and drank with sinners. Philippians 2, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

That is true humility. Godly humility. That God humbled himself to die for you, there is no greater humility and love. So Philippians continues, "Therefore God has highly exalted him, Jesus, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

You see, by his incarnation, death and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled his own parable. The parable today sounds like it's directed to us, telling us what to do, "When you are invited to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor. 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.'" But this parable is primarily about Jesus, and what he has done for you.

Because Jesus is the one who took the lowest place at the wedding feast, even though he was the greatest guest. No, he is the host, the bridegroom of the church! And yet Jesus took the lowest place at his own wedding feast. He took the lowest place on the cross, the place of criminals and murderers. He made the cross his throne and the grave his bed.

Therefore God the Father has highly exalted him and given him the glorious, divine name. God has revealed to all the world by the resurrection of Jesus that this man is true God, begotten from eternity, God of God and light of light, that every knee should bow and worship him.

And we are called to imitate him, imitate Christ.

But what does Christian humility look like? We often think being humble is realizing we might not be the best person for the job. So we don't like to put ourselves forward or volunteer. We think less of ourselves and

more of others. All that is good, but don't let it paralyze you. The church needs you and your help, even if you aren't the most perfectly qualified person. If everyone was too humble like that, there would be no pastors and no teachers and no musicians.

So humility is more than not putting yourself forward and volunteering your services. Humility is about repentance and faith. True humility is confessing your sins before God and one another, without holding back or expecting anything in return. It's trusting in Jesus, even when he sends you troubles. It's forgiving others, even when they refuse to apologize. It's holding your tongue, even when you know you're right. It's serving others, rather than being served.

Perhaps the best description of true, Christian humility is found in today's epistle reading. "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called," – in a manner worthy of Christ – "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Humility is patience, gentleness, bearing with one another in the Holy Spirit. But patience is hard. Bearing with one another in love is hard. We all have our irritating quirks. Even among Christians, we easily get on each other's nerves. Over the years, familiarity breeds contempt. We get frustrated and impatient. We fail to bear with one another. We become harsh and critical, failing to overlook one another's faults in love.

But if unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace is our goal, if Jesus is our teacher, then we show lovingkindness and patience. We bear with one another with all gentleness, just as Christ bears with us and forgives our sin and faults, day after day.

So humble yourself. Humble yourself before each other, and before God. When you catch yourself complaining about your brothers and sisters in Christ, or when you despise other for their faults, humble yourself, and repent, and change your heart.

And when you realize your sin, do not despair. For the One who humbled himself, even unto death, the One who is now crowned with glory and honor, the King himself is present here in the church, here at this wedding banquet, to forgive. He who offered up his body and blood for your atonement now invites you to come and eat and drink and be forgiven for all your pride.

Jesus provides the banquet, Jesus furnishes the bread and wine, and Jesus invites you as his beloved guest, week after week. Yes, he knows your sin and your weakness, but he invites you to come take your place at the table. So come humble yourself in repentance at the lowest place, saying "I, a poor miserable sinner..." Then he will lift you up to his high altar.

And the communion table is not only between you and God, vertically. It's also between you and your brothers and sisters, horizontally, joining us together perfectly in the perfect body and blood of Jesus. The communion of the saints joins us in fellowship with one another.

Kneeling side by side at the altar, with Jesus as our host, humbling ourselves all together and confessing our sins all together – communion joins us all as the body of Christ, his bride, the one church, in one baptism, worshipping the one Lord and God and Father of all, in the bond of peace and the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Oh what a joy it is to be reconciled to each other, kneeling together at the altar in the bond of peace, where Jesus himself says to us all, "The peace of the Lord be with you always."

So put yourself in the lowest place, humbling yourself before God and one another. Confess your sins again and again to God and each other. And then, in his proper time, the mighty King, the Lord and bridegroom of the feast, who gave himself up for you – then he who has brought you to this altar will also bring you to the eternal wedding feast in paradise with angels and archangels and all the host of heaven. And there, in the presence of all the saints triumphant, he will speak to you those beautiful words, "Friend, move up higher." Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.