

Luke 14:1–11 (Trinity XVII)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
October 9, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Here we see Jesus teaching a similar lesson in humility to what we had a few weeks ago on the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity from Luke 18, the lesson of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in the Temple. There again Jesus teaches, “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” There, Jesus addresses man’s pride before God. Here, Jesus addresses man’s pride before other men.

Jesus noticed how those invited to the party at the Pharisee’s house chose the places of honor, so Jesus takes the opportunity to give some of the best social advice you could ever receive. If you take the place of honor for yourself, you run the risk of being humiliated. However, if you take the place of humility, you just might receive honor. Of course, the lesson Jesus is teaching us is not just about going to a party. Jesus is teaching us to take an honest look at ourselves, to gain a true estimation of ourselves before God and others. We are, indeed, lowly, but the Lord raises us up to a place of honor. Just as God humbled Himself by becoming man that He might exalt humanity to God’s right hand, so does the Lord humble us that He might raise us to a place of honor. We are humble because our Lord is humble, and we are exalted because our Lord is exalted.

The lesson Jesus teaches on humility and exaltation is a lesson straight from King Solomon in Proverbs 25[:6–7]: “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.” Solomon’s wisdom applies to all times and places. Although you probably won’t ever have to stand in the presence of an earthly king, there are formal situations in life where you must learn to take your place. Jesus uses the example of a wedding feast. Even today, wedding receptions often have a head table for the bride and groom and their attendants. Can you imagine a random wedding guest deciding to take one of those places of honor? Or think about the wedding itself. Oftentimes the front pews will be reserved for family and special guests. How embarrassing to be asked to move from your seat to somewhere farther back, and in front of the whole crowd.

Most people understand the social norm that you ought to choose the lower place. That’s why people will sit in the back row or try to go towards the end of the food line. People generally don’t want to look like they think too highly of themselves. But even then, in this life we often barely succeed in covering over what’s going on inside. Even if we are able to live somewhat respectably from an outside perspective, Jesus is getting at what’s happening below the surface in our heart. There’s a selfishness and a pride within that makes us think of ourselves more highly than we ought (Rom 12:3). Our sinful human nature would have us believe we are the center of the universe, the most important person in the room, the smartest, the most capable, the best looking, and so forth. So of course we desire the position of honor, even if we don’t dare grab for it.

It’s the same way in whatever station of life we find ourselves. People are constantly overestimating themselves and seeking the honor belonging to those above them. That’s why citizens are often so critical of the governing authorities, or why students complain about their teachers. It’s easy to pass judgment on what someone else is doing and think how we would do it so much better were we in that position. This self-exaltation is a scramble for a higher position

than where God has placed us. Rather than focus on serving God and doing our duty in the place God has ordained for us, we try to discredit what others are doing while at the same time seeking the honor that belongs to them.

From a worldly, human perspective, we can understand how off-putting it is for people to overestimate themselves and to seek another's glory. So why do we do it? Why do we tend to think of ourselves more highly than we ought? Why do we think we deserve the place of honor at the table more than others? The reason we desire the place of honor is because we are deluded about our own importance. We have a distorted view of reality. In moments of sobriety we see that we're really not all that different from most other people. We share the same hopes and fears, the same temptations and sicknesses. We're basically average in everything we do. Yet sin leads us to compare ourselves with others in a way that makes us stand out. Sin makes us overestimate our abilities and accomplishments. Sin makes us care more about what other people think of us than what God thinks of us, and so we long for the place of honor. We want nothing more than for others to think highly of us.

So it is in this fallen world: a constant battle for honor and prestige. The world seeks to be praised and honored by the mighty and by all people, yet never reflects on how frail and flighty all people truly are. But Christianity is different because our Lord Jesus Christ is different. The Gentiles are locked in a never ending power struggle, but Jesus says to "let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. Jesus Himself is among us as the one who serves (Luke 22:26–27) by giving His life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28).

The Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, was seated at the head of the table. He possessed all the honor and the glory that belongs to God, a glory He shared with God

the Father before the world ever existed (John 17:5). He was in the form of God, but did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Jesus left His place at the head of the table and came to the lowest position, the place of the servant. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Nothing could be more humiliating. Nothing could be more shameful. Nothing could appear so foolish. Our Lord hung naked on a cross, seemingly powerless before His enemies. But He did it all to serve you, to give His life as a ransom for you, as payment for your sins.

Jesus humbled Himself for your sake, but he who humbles Himself will be exalted. Therefore God has highly exalted Him 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. Jesus humbled Himself by taking on your flesh and blood to redeem your flesh and blood in His death. Our Lord humbled Himself for you, and so He was exalted for you. He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty. Our human flesh and blood are now exalted on high, sitting upon God's throne in the person of Jesus Christ. God humbled Himself by becoming man and so He exalted our human nature by joining it to Himself for all eternity.

Before the LORD we are of small account (Job 40:4), just like everyone else. If we truly compare ourselves with others, we will see how lowly we actually are. But baptized into Christ Jesus, God raises us up with all other Christians to a place of honor. By grace God saved us. In Holy Baptism He made us alive together with Christ Jesus and raised us up with Him, seating us together in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph 2:6). Baptized into Christ Jesus, we now occupy a

seat of honor as sons of the living God (Gal 3:26). And so the LORD also prepares a table for us at His altar. In the Lord's Supper we find a true wedding feast where the groom provides everything for us, His bride. Our heavenly bridegroom has sanctified us and cleansed us by the washing of water with the Word. We stand before God in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, all our blemishes and sins washed away by the blood of the Lamb. And now our Lord nourishes us and cherishes us as His own body with His own body and blood. Jesus gives us a place at the head table, a seat of honor at the marriage supper of the Lamb that has no end.

Even now, our status in Christ Jesus means we don't need to worry about what other people think about us. We have a place of honor even if it doesn't look like it right now. Why seek after the transitory honor of this world when we have eternal glory prepared for us? To seek after the honor of this world will only lead to disappointment. Why worry about scrambling for a seat at the top when we know God already has a place reserved for us? There's no need to seek the approval of men because we already have the approval of God. Jesus shows us that the Lord is on our side. What can man do to us? Absolutely nothing. We belong to God (Psalm 118:6). In Him, we can finally rest from the constant striving of this world.

Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. The Lord humbles us. He shows us what we truly are before others and before God so that He might exalt us, raising us up together with Jesus Christ. The Lord teaches us to see who we really are as sinners, but He also teaches us to see ourselves as God sees us—as His children whose sins have been washed away and paid for by the blood of Jesus. We don't take the place of honor for ourselves. No, we sit where we belong in Christian humility, knowing we are weak and lowly, but also knowing that God's power is made perfect in weakness. In Christ Jesus, we who are weak become strong. God raises us up to a place of honor. In the name of Jesus, Amen.