

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 5, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 14:1, 7-14

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched... When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (NIV)

Years ago my friend Dan and I went to a ball game to watch our favorite baseball team, the Milwaukee Brewers. To say the least, we were way up in the cheap seats. But then we got an idea. There weren't too many people in some of the seats in front of us so we decided to move down a bit into better seats, then we moved a bit more and more, and finally we moved so far down we ended up in pretty much the best seats in the place. Now you could see the players faces and felt like you were almost right in the action. We were in seats we certainly couldn't afford and were enjoying every minute of it until something happened. An usher came by, tapped us on the shoulders, and asked to see our tickets. Someone yelled out "busted" and we had to put our heads down and head back to the seats way up where we belonged. We were not only embarrassed but I believe we learned a little bit of a lesson on humility that day. Today, Jesus wants to teach a similar lesson. Let this Word of Christ dwell in you richly as: **Jesus gives some Pharisees a much needed lesson in humility.**

The Pharisees were the Jewish religious leaders and most of them were constantly at odds with Jesus. They were self-righteous; the law keepers who were constantly watching over the laws of Moses and even making up their own laws for people to keep. In the latter part of Jesus' ministry their opposition against Christ began to increase. A couple chapters earlier Luke reports that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were trying to trap Jesus "*waiting to catch him in something he might say.*" (11) The setting for our text is now this: "*One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.*" Jesus is invited to the house of a prominent Pharisee, literally one of the ruling Pharisees. Most likely he was a member of the Sanhedrin - the highest ruling body of the Jews. As they have Jesus there on this Sabbath day they were watching Him very carefully again looking for something against Him.

In the verses omitted from our text Jesus asks them if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath and when Jesus gets no answer He heals a suffering man right in front of them. Jesus points out their hypocrisy by asking which of them would not pick up a son or oxen that fell into a pit on the Sabbath. But we are told they had nothing to say. But Jesus does. He made an observation while He was there with these Pharisees and experts of the law. ***“When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”***

What a much needed lesson for these Pharisees and teachers of the law of whom Jesus repeatedly said ***“They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues.”*** (Matt. 23:6, Mk 12:39, Luke 20:26) The lesson is pretty straight forward and easy to understand, isn’t it? If you think too highly of yourself and take the best seat you will be humbled and brought down when you find out that seat is for someone else. You will be humiliated. If you take the best place for yourself, if you become too big in your own mind, if you start to swell with pride, if you think of yourself as great in your own eyes, eventually you will be humbled. Solomon says it well in Proverbs: ***“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”*** (16)

Didn’t the Pharisees need to hear this? They considered themselves better than others. They looked down on Jesus because He kept company with tax collectors and other “sinners.” They were proud of themselves and their laws. They put on showy displays and made sure they prayed where others could hear them. Worst of all, many of them thought so much of themselves they saw no need for Jesus. They needed a good dose of humble pie, so Jesus gives them a lesson on humility.

But Jesus instructions for them were not over. ***“Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.”*** Jesus teaches that true humility will show itself in love for others - for all others. Again what Jesus says is pretty clear, isn’t it? Jesus warns about giving only when there is a hope of receiving something in return. He warns about showing partiality to the important and wealthy. He warns about only helping others so we can expect something back. Again, this is a lesson these Pharisees and this prominent host needed to hear.

Aren’t we glad Jesus straightens out some Pharisees with these parables? Isn’t this a much needed lesson for these pompous and self-righteous teachers? We almost want to cheer Jesus on as He lectures them and teaches them what humility is all about. When we start to think this way we need to wait just a second. We need to pause and look closer at Jesus’ words. Then we will see there are some more Pharisees that need this lesson. I looked at one in the mirror this morning and I am looking at a room full of them now. Isn’t there a little Pharisee in all of us? How often don’t you and I need a dose of humility? We are Pharisees that sometimes think

of ourselves as better than other people. We too are Pharisees that like to have people notice our works and good deeds. Aren't we Pharisees who are afraid at times that we won't get the credit we think we have coming? We are sometimes the host that wants to be good only to those who can be good to us. Don't we act like Pharisees and sin every time we place our own laws or feelings or what we want ahead of God's Word?

The most dangerous part of the self-righteous little Pharisee in each of us is thinking we deserve God's grace and favor and that we can have or earn anything from God apart from Jesus. So we too, dear friends, are some Pharisees who need this lesson in humility. ***"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*** We need to recognize how unworthy we truly are and how our sinful pride has earned us nothing but hell.

Only then can we turn our eyes to the One who not only teaches about humility, but the One who humbled Himself for us. Jesus practiced what He preached - perfectly. He made himself nothing taking on the very nature of a servant. Our God lowered Himself and became man to save us. Want to see humility - look at the manger in Bethlehem - look at the life of a faithful servant who never considered Himself better than others but was even willing to wash His disciples' dirty feet. Want to see humility - look at your God who humbled Himself even to an obedient death on a cross - a death He willingly died to save sinners - to save you and me. Now our crucified and risen Savior is the most gracious host of all. He invites the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. He invites all through the Gospel to enjoy the banquet of His salvation and feast in a life that is eternal.

As I look back, instead of trying to move into seats we didn't pay for or deserve, how nice it would have been if someone would have come up to us and said: *"Friends, come way down here and take these better seats and enjoy the game."* Yet, Christ did something far greater for us! He took the worse seat - a place of suffering and hell and death on the cross - so we could have the best seats ever - a place with God - a place in heaven. That is why we will willingly want to take to heart this much needed lesson in humility. Our true glory is in Christ. We can be unselfish because Jesus has made us rich beyond all earthly treasure. We look forward to the resurrection of the righteous. So as Jesus teaches us today, as we read from the pen of His apostle Paul: ***"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"*** (Philippians 2). Amen.

