

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. [Amen]

The theme for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, which is present in all our appointed readings, is that of humility. Which means that the primary text for today's sermon is the Gospel according to Luke in the fourteenth chapter: **Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**<sup>1</sup>

In our Gospel reading we hear that when Jesus was invited to dinner at the house of a prominent member of the Pharisaic party, He used the occasion as an opportunity to deliver the good news of the Kingdom of God through both healing and teaching. Specifically, as the ministry of Jesus is the embodiment of God's Reign on earth to seek and save the lost, our Savior King drove home the character of His Kingship through the concept of humility. Jesus is the humble King who in everything acts not for the sake of Himself, but for the sake of you His creatures... Humility, then, is ultimately comprehended, received, and put into practice through Christ's own humbling of himself – a humbling even to death, and death on a cross. The Son of God humiliated himself by becoming incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary, by submitting to Joseph and Mary as parents though He was their Lord and God, by observing the Ten Commandments perfectly though He was their Author, and by giving His life as ransom for a world that neither cared nor believed in Him. Humility is Christological – which is just the fancy way of saying that in the end it's all about Jesus. And so our text reads, and notice the shift from plural to singular, **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**<sup>2</sup> He who humbles Himself is Jesus... Humility is a characteristic that belongs to Christ first, and then to Christians through their reception of Christ in Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. To put it plainly, humbleness is participation in the humiliation of Jesus Christ. As Paul says in our epistle reading, humility is walking **in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.**<sup>3</sup> This calling is the call to be crucified with Christ

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 14:11.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 14:11.

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 4:1.

through Baptism. Meaning then that, through the humiliation of death and the cross, as God the Father exalts His Son raising Him from death to life and seating Him at His right hand in heaven, so also everyone who receives Jesus in true faith, is exalted, or called, from the lowliness of death and hell to the honored of place of life in heaven...

Yet, as it is with all good gifts from the Lord, even humility so often becomes one that is misunderstood and abused... The popular yet incorrect reading of today's Gospel text is really the same error that the Pharisees purported in their false observance of the Sabbath – that being – humility, or Sabbath resting, is a quality achieved through the observance of the law... or, if you want to be more humble, you just really need to try and be more humble. But humility is a game that you can't win... And honestly, it's for that reason that sinners so often just change the definition of humility to fit their own mold. You hear it all the time, *just was awarded a scholarship to college... so humbling. Was promoted at work this week, such a humbling experience. I have such a wonderful family, wow just so humbled by it all.* While it's true that it is absolutely humbling to get things you don't deserve, especially when you realize how lazy you've actually been at work, or how mediocre or downright bad of a parent or child you've been, it's not that often that you hear it said how humbled a person is when their life and their relationships crumble because of their own sin.... What I mean is that, on the flip side, you hardly ever see a post on Facebook or an article in the newspaper about how a person is proud for getting rewarded because of doing a terrible job or being a terrible person. By the way of the world, humility is confined really to the business of you getting things because you worked for them. That's why it becomes so important to tell people how humbled you are...

But the truth is that sinners aren't humble. In fact, sinners don't even understand true humility. For the world, being humble really is just a way to get back on top. It's not about losing things, it's about gaining things. The goal of worldly humility is to earn the honorary title of "most humble person"... Today's text asks us to consider what it means to be truly humble. Is it actual humility, when outwardly you're nice to pretty much everyone but inwardly you play favorites? Is it true humility when you secretly kind of love how people praise you for your charity and you get a little disappointed when nobody notices the sacrifices you're making for them?... Is it a

humble quality that we can't actually listen to someone else's story without waiting for our turn to interject with our own epic tale?

True humbleness though is a state of self-emptying. To empty oneself is to become the very least. It is to be selfless... It means not caring that you weren't recognized for your "good deeds" or your "hard work." It means suffering injustice without standing up for yourself... It means taking the lesser seat even if you think you deserve the higher one, or knowing that you deserve the lower seat to begin with. Humility isn't concerned about moving up in the world... When Jesus tells this parable from our Gospel reading He isn't giving you the playbook on how to get more honor. He is describing to you your need for forgiveness and the reality of the Gospel. A state of true humility is comprehended only through the knowledge that God gives everything to you even though you deserve the opposite.

That is why Pharisees don't have the power to answer Jesus when He says, "**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?**"<sup>4</sup>... The answer is obviously, yes; but the Pharisees, literally, **were not strong enough to answer these things**<sup>5</sup>... The Pharisees can't answer because they think the Sabbath is observed in the same way true humility is obtained – through a person's own efforts. Ironically, they end up working extremely hard to figure out how to not work on the Sabbath... But the point is that the Pharisees can't answer Jesus because they don't understand the Gospel. And without the Gospel, humility isn't about Christ. Without the Gospel, the Sabbath is no longer a day about the Lord's mercy... Without Jesus, it's all about you... you and your prideful efforts to earn the title of "most humble." Most humble before God and most humble before your neighbor...

False humility, which is really called pride, will eventually leave you to the exact same place as it did the Pharisees: silent and convicted before the living God... So repent... because there is no room in heaven for the proud. And Jesus says in our text, **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled**<sup>6</sup>... So turn away from yourself and look to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Learn

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 14:3.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 14:6.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 14:11.

from Him again what the Sabbath, humility, and the whole Kingdom of God are actually about. Keep learning, as you do every time you gather to receive God's Gifts, that the Kingdom of God is all about mercy. It's about God freely giving every good thing to you despite the fact that you deserve to be left stranded like an ox that fell into a well... That's why Jesus uses that example with the Pharisees: **“which one of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?”**<sup>7</sup>

The Sabbath is about the Triune God's humble mercy... because just how a father would never leave his son or ox left stranded in a well on the Sabbath, so God your Father refuses to leave you stranded in the darkness of your own sinful pride. Your Father sends His own beloved Son to descend into the well of this world to take your place. Christ lowers Himself, that you might be raised up... Unlike the false humbleness of sinners, Jesus humility doesn't have an ulterior motive... He isn't looking out for himself by being humble... He isn't only humbling himself for the sake of those that deserve it...

Jesus humbles Himself so that through Him everyone, even the prideful Pharisees, might be exalted. That is why, if you notice during the Nicene Creed, Pastor, myself, and the Deacon – in Christian freedom – lower our heads while we confess that Christ *for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man*. The apostle Paul teaches us that, **Christ Jesus, 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**<sup>8</sup>...

The incarnation of Christ is the heart of humility... that is why you are free to lower your head in the Creed. And that is why you can then raise your head at the mention of the crucifixion under Pontus Pilate. We do that because through His humiliating death, **God has highly exalted Christ and bestowed on him the name that is above every name**<sup>9</sup>... Through Christ's perfect death came Resurrection, Accession, and Exaltation.

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 14:5.

<sup>8</sup> Philippians 2:5-8.

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 2:9.

And we raise our heads then because Jesus does all this not for Himself, but in true humility, He does it all for you. Christ was humbled and exalted so that through him you might be humbled and exalted. He died and rose so that through faith in Him you might die and rise with Him. All of you who are baptized into Christ bear the Name which is above all names... and that means, as Jesus says, **you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you.**<sup>10</sup> It doesn't matter that you can't seem to shake your lust for pride. It doesn't matter that you'd rather love your life than lose it... It doesn't matter that you know you don't deserve to be in the House of God, nonetheless to have a seat at the Lord's table... Jesus didn't come to save the righteous. He didn't come to call up people from high seats to even higher seats.... His invitation isn't a trap like the Pharisees' was. Jesus' invitation is pure grace. He invites even the most proud, the most filthy sinners He can find, and He says to them, He says to you, **Friend move up higher.**<sup>11</sup> All of you here today, like the man with dropsy, like the silent Pharisees, you sinners are all honored guests of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath is really all about the grace of God. It's about God the Father through His Son **dealing with [His] servants according to mercy.**<sup>12</sup> The Sabbath is about receiving new life from Jesus in that Great Reversal of humiliation to exaltation... It's about being invited to the greater seat reserved for you in Christ and then returning to the world to serve your neighbor in true humility just as Christ has served you...

And so, as you heard earlier, the apostle Paul urges you in consideration of Jesus' own death and resurrection for you, to **walk in the manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 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.**<sup>13</sup> Humble yourself before your neighbor so that they might be exalted in Christ. Deal with your brothers and sisters, your friends and your enemies, according to the mercy that God has shown you. Seek out the people who aren't your favorite instead of avoiding them. Let your friends have the spotlight even if

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 14:10.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 14:10.

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 119:124

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4:1-3.

you have a better story. When you give, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... Remember that you are humble in Christ; **for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**<sup>14</sup> Amen.

And the peace of God which passes all human understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Amen].

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 14:11.