

12th Sunday after Pentecost
August 31, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

Luke 14:1, 7-14 (EHV)

One Sabbath day, when Jesus went into the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat bread, they were watching him closely....⁷When he noticed how they were selecting the places of honor, he told the invited guests a parable. ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline in the place of honor, or perhaps someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him. ⁹The one who invited both of you may come and tell you, ‘Give this man your place.’ Then you will begin, with shame, to take the lowest place.

¹⁰“But when you are invited, go and recline in the lowest place, so that when the one who invited you comes, he will tell you, ‘Friend, move up to a higher place.’ Then you will have honor in the presence of all who are reclining at the table with you. ¹¹“Yes, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

¹²He also said to the one who had invited him, “When you make a dinner or a supper, do not invite your friends, or your brothers, or your relatives, or rich neighbors, so that perhaps they may also return the favor and pay you back. ¹³“But when you make a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. Certainly, you will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Jesus told many parables and often the disciples would even have to ask him privately what the parable meant. Certainly, those who opposed Christ, did not understand many of the parables. However, as Jesus approached the time of his suffering and death, his parables and teachings became much clearer and more pointed. No one asked what he meant because everyone knew who and what he was talking about. We have such a parable today. Jesus wounds the Pharisees with this parable with the hope of bringing them to repentance and to his healing forgiveness. We don't have their response so we will consider our own response to Jesus' clear teaching that “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

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Jesus is not exactly subtle in his parable. The people have arrived for a dinner party and Jesus tells a parable about arriving for a wedding party. The Pharisees are going to figure out pretty soon, or rather, immediately that he is talking about them. No secret here. Think about how that will affect the guests. They are invited for a Sabbath meal with a prominent Pharisee. But this upstart teacher named Jesus dares to challenge them, to tell a story about them, to humiliate them as this special dinner party. Many of the guests would be uncomfortable from the moment Jesus begins his parable.

The host would be more than uncomfortable. Jesus is criticizing his honored guests. Jesus is making him look bad. The Pharisees were all about looking good in the eyes of others. The host wanted people to praise him for good food and hospitality and entertainment. Jesus was ruining appetites and the atmosphere by pointing out sin instead of praising the host and guests. The guests wanted to be honored in the eyes of the other guests. They wanted to catch the eye of the host. Everyone was looking to improve his own reputation in the group. By telling a parable about them, Jesus is making everyone look bad. It only gets more uncomfortable as the parable continues.

When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline in the place of honor, or perhaps someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him. ⁹The one who invited both of you may come and tell you, ‘Give this man your place.’ Then you will begin, with shame, to

take the lowest place. ¹⁰“But when you are invited, go and recline in the lowest place, so that when the one who invited you comes, he will tell you, ‘Friend, move up to a higher place.’ Then you will have honor in the presence of all who are reclining at the table with you. ¹¹“Yes, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

Jesus points out exactly what the dinner guests are doing, and the not-so-subtle implication is that they are sinning by seeking the place of honor. It is almost as if Jesus knows their hearts, because Jesus knows their hearts. Christ knows our hearts too. He knows when and where we have been seeking the place of honor, where we have been more concerned about our reputation than anything else.

Perhaps your child did something embarrassing, wrong, sinful, or disrespectful and they do so in the library or the grocery store aisle or in church. Of course, this is hypothetical, because your children are perfect in every way. When something like that happens, are you, the parent, also embarrassed? Likely. Do we get upset with our child because they embarrassed us or are we concerned that they are disobeying God? It is sinful pride to be more concerned with how my child makes me look than to be concerned about my child’s relationship with Jesus. Parents may also look for the place of honor through the accomplishments of their children. The grades, trophies, awards, job, and worldly success of a child is something to celebrate and thank the Lord for. But these things are not trophies for us to hold up before others to show that we are better parent than them because our child achieved something.

Do we get upset when our name is not mentioned along with others for a job well done at work or school? Do we serve others and then become frustrated that no one thanks us or serves us in return? This is also sinful pride. For we are looking for the place of honor based on what we have done, and we believe what we have done is worthy of such honor. Jesus’ words wound us as well - *everyone who exalts himself will be humbled*.

We say words to God like this almost every Sunday, “I deserve your punishment both now and forever.” Jesus tells us today that we should really mean what we confess. We deserve to be at the lowest place at the table. We don’t even deserve to be at the table. Our sins against the Lord and against others should keep us from having any place at God’s table. We come before our God and take the lowest place in humble repentance. And our Lord Jesus says to us, “Friend, move up to a higher place.”

He calls us “friend”! In our sins, we are no friend of God. But Jesus calls us friend! For Jesus Christ has taken our sins away. He did not just ruin the dinner parties of Pharisees with teachings that he himself would not do. Jesus did what he taught. The exalted Son of God humbled himself to serve sinners and save sinners. Paul writes these words in Philippians 2: *He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:8-9).*

Jesus took the lowest seat at the table, going to the cross to suffer and die. He had the highest seat at the right hand of his Father in heaven. He deserved the highest seat of honor. He is better than everyone else. Yet, he humbled himself to serve all who could not save themselves. He served and saved us by dying in our place to forgive every sin. Now he calls us friend and invites us to move up to a higher place.

What an honor to have a seat at the table in God’s kingdom and what an honor to be called up to a higher place by Jesus. But in God’s kingdom, a higher place does not mean more privileges, it means more selfless service. Jesus explains:

“When you make a dinner or a supper, do not invite your friends, or your brothers, or your relatives, or rich neighbors, so that perhaps they may also return the favor and pay you back. ¹³“But when you make a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. Certainly, you will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous.”

Jesus did not humble himself to save us so that we owe him something. He did not do it so that we would pay him back in any way. Jesus gave his life for us because he loved us. It was pure grace, the undeserved love of God, that moved Jesus to humble himself for us. His invitation to move to a better place is an invitation to be more like him.

This is our opportunity to serve others without any hope of being repaid. It looks like a husband and wife serving each other without keeping score. It looks like children helping mom and dad without being asked and without asking for any reward. It looks like doing more than expected at work especially when no one is looking or notices. It looks like anonymous encouragement and gifts to someone who is hurting. We love those who don't deserve it because he first loved us who did not deserve it. We serve because he first served us. And we don't expect a reward now or ever.

But grace upon grace, Jesus promises that believers will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous. We did not earn a place at God's table by our repentance. We did not earn the right to be the friend of Christ by our humility. We have not earned a better place of honor at God's table by our works. We have not earned any further rewards in heaven by serving others selflessly in this life. Our place at the table is God's free gift. Our friendship with Christ is God's gift. Our moving to a higher place in order to serve more is God's gift. And whatever being repaid in heaven looks like is also God's free gift. The Lord is a gracious God who loves to give and give and give. What an honor to be exalted by our giving God to a place where we have the opportunity to give like him.

Amen.