

TRINITY XVII – SEPTEMBER 26, 2021 – LUKE 14:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

Amen.

“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.” Thus far our text.

The song, “Hail to the Chief” was written at the request of one of the former First Ladies of the United States. Reportedly, she asked to have some way of knowing when her husband, the President of the United States, was entering the room. She couldn’t see him because he was very short! Of course, everyone would agree that the President is the most important person in the United States, isn’t he? Relative importance of different people still plays a part in our society today. Those who are of lesser importance make way and give due deference to those who are of prime social standing. Have you ever been to a banquet where there was assigned seating? Some wedding receptions and parties are set up this way; other gatherings are done on a first-come, first-served basis.

But, those that have assigned seating take the element of choosing seats out of the hands of the guests on an ad-hoc basis; rather, the host of the party makes the decision based on the relative prominence of the guests who are invited. In our text for today, Jesus was invited and accepted the invitation to a banquet being held by a prominent Pharisee. Of course, He was being watched, to see whether or not He would obey the “rules” that they had set up for how different people were to behave around each other. They wanted to see if He would respect the differences between classes of people that they had set up, or if He would rock the boat and establish new “etiquette” for them to follow. However, they were surprised by the way that He handled the situation, because He did not get hung up on pretense at all; rather, He stated that humility should be the norm for the day. Rather than worrying if they were in the right places, He advocated a self-view of being less than those around them, and retaining this in the face of the culture. In short, He reiterated the beatitude of “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Humility is sometimes a forgotten virtue. In the struggle to “get ahead”, many people put it on the back burner for the sake of self-preservation. In our text, we are told that these were “prominent Pharisees”. These were people that wanted others to know that they were following the law completely, and were without reproach. Those who were lesser Pharisees wouldn’t be invited, much less those who were not Pharisees. I get the image of people much like the Pharisee who prayed in the temple that he would not be like the humble tax collector, but rather a good man like himself. These people were certainly not ones who would minimize their accomplishments, or be shy at all about telling others how good they really were. Thus, there was a great discussion going on, we can imagine, among these “holy men”, of who was going to sit where at the table,

since there weren't assigned seats! Among a group of people who cared about social standing, there still had to be a "pecking order". How they would decide it was yet to be seen, yet they were certain there had to be an order established.

The same thing is true in our society today, isn't it? We aren't humble people, are we? With the Presidential campaigns going on, as well as those trying to "ride the coattails" of the prominent national candidates, there is a lot of exalting of personal characteristics, both by the candidates and the news media. Modesty certainly is not the "long suit" of most candidates for public office. Rather, the prevailing attitude is to strut everything you can about yourself, and allow the voters to know what is really good about you. This self-arrogation is so common that we hardly notice it, but it does have a bearing on this text. People still separate themselves into differing categories of importance, and elections of officials sometimes brings this to the forefront.

Another current example of those who are not shy about promoting themselves and taking a high position for themselves occurs with those who are applying for employment, and are circulating resumes and cover letters. The number one thing that we are told when we are applying for a job is that we shouldn't be afraid to "sell ourselves well." Rather than letting people find out for themselves what we are good at, and what our strengths are, we are encouraged to let them know ourselves. After all, "if we don't look out for ourselves, no one else will," is a common sentiment. The old country song which is as follows, "O Lord, it's hard to be humble...when you're perfect in every way...I can't wait to look in the mirror...'cause I get better looking each day," still holds true. In fact, it is a bit of a stretch, but this over-positive self-image translates into the risqué styles of dress that are around today. If we believe we should put

everything about us out on display, the revealing clothes shouldn't come as a shock. Even the loss of shame that is so prevalent today about things that previous generations would not have shared can be attributed to this loss of humility.

I'm not saying that we should have a negative view of ourselves, and have a problem with our self-image. I'm not saying that we should think badly about ourselves, and run into a problem with despising ourselves. Rather, I'm saying that this text directs us to be humble, and to recognize that we are not as good as we think that we are! Being completely negative about ourselves is also unhealthy, because it denigrates God's creation (us). We are the apple of His eye, and the crown of His creation. We just need to make sure that we don't try to shine up that apple too much, to the point that we make it into something that it is not.

But, how do we keep this humility, which is God's will, active in our daily lives? The ability to do this doesn't come from us, but from God. If it were to come from us, we would fail to be humble every day of our lives, because all around us in society are urges to not do God's will, and become arrogant. But rather, the power to remain humble comes from God. Philippians 2 says it best, when Paul writes, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross." Because Jesus humbled Himself, and died for our sins, He makes it possible for us to withstand temptation and be humble as well. He didn't have to come and suffer and die for us, but His love caused Him to come. He works through the Holy Spirit to kill self-

righteous thoughts in our hearts, and work humility there in their place. He does all of this when we could not do it ourselves, and all the good things are His work, and not ours.

We must remember, furthermore, that we are all equal in the sight of God. We are all sinful men, in need of a Savior. We are all redeemed by Christ, because of God's love for us. Therefore, we shouldn't think of each other more highly than we ought, because we are all equal in our need to be redeemed, and in the fact that we have been redeemed. The needs and benefits are the same for all men. Knowledge of and faith in these truths enable us to be humble, and to avoid self-arrogating thoughts. God promises to keep us mindful of the truths of His Word, and to keep us in His will and ways.

Also, this lack of humility will get us in trouble in the long run. This world is not the end of things; rather, we have a future in heaven with Jesus. Thus, to think of worldly things such as position in life (as those who are not humble often do) is to forget the perspective we need to have. After all, we should primarily think of things that last, such as standing with God, and not things that will pass away, such as standing with men. Furthermore, there are no "bad seats" in heaven – rather, all are complete in their nearness to God, Whose presence will be all that we need and want forever. We thank God that He has loved us so much that He sent His Son to be the servant of all, to ensure our eternal home in heaven. We don't worry about what position of honor we will have in heaven. Such considerations are a thing of this world, and not of the world to come. We would much rather be servants in heaven, in the presence of God, rather than kings and queens in hell with the devil. We are all promised a place in heaven, where there is

no more sin or arrogance or pride or concern for position, but only humility and perfect peace with God.

Often, people get too big an opinion about themselves in life – they think that they are more important than they really are. An example of this is the employee working in a menial task that thinks they are really in charge of the company they work for. It is fine to have an attitude of importance to the company; it is wrong to think you are more important than others around you. The world around us tells us to “look out for number one, because no one else will.” Of course, in this case, number one is ourselves, and no one else! This attitude has been around as long as sin has been in the world, which entered in Genesis chapter 3 (a LONG time ago)! The Pharisees wanted to see if Jesus would perpetuate and support their divisions of men into different classes of importance; rather, Jesus made statements that left them reeling in their disbelief. His humility in coming to earth, suffering, dying and rising again as the Son of God was to be perpetuated in the lives of men, rather than self-arrogation. He provides the power to be humble; the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to produce these good works. He also enables us to remember that we are all equally those for whom Christ died; we are no better and no worse than anyone else on earth in our sinfulness; we are no more and no less forgiven by Christ on the cross of Calvary. This knowledge, and the God-given power to focus on the world to come, and not the world that we are in, allows us not to seek out the places of prominence in society, but rather to humbly serve god in our vocations in life, wherever they may be. And, if we ever get into a position of great earthly power, He will give us the strength to not let the song, “Hail to the Chief” go to our heads and corrupt our thinking. He will keep us steadfast in faith in Him, and will

guide us in doing good works for our neighbor, regardless of what the status of our neighbor is at a given time. Humility doesn't come from us; otherwise, it wouldn't be true humility! Rather, it comes from God, the giver of all good gifts, out of His great love for us His children. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.