The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (C), September 1, 2019

Luke 14:1-11 (esp. v. 11)

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In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The Word of God which engages us this morning is based on Luke 14: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Pride is a dreadful disease, and in the end, it will kill you.

You in your pride think of yourself more highly than you should. You believe that you are smarter, more resilient, and more worthy than the people you compete with. And you *do compete* with people. Pride is always in competition. It sees other people as a threat to your own worthiness—because your worthiness is determined by your being the best. After all, if you are not the best—if you are not *deserving* of something—then what good are you? Why should you have a place at the table, if it is not the place of honor? As the venerable Ricky Bobby says, "If you ain't first, you're last."

But pride doesn't just make you think of yourself *more highly* than you should; pride also makes you think of yourself *more* than you should. You in your pride believe that other people exist in order to serve you and praise you. If you do a good job and no one notices, you get angry. If you and your friend play the same sport but she is better at it and actually wins competitions, you get jealous. If you make the effort to dress nicely and no one says anything, shameful thoughts consume you. Pride screams into the wind, "Look at me, look at me!"

On the other hand, Jesus says, "For everyone who *exalts* himself will be *humbled*, and he who *humbles* himself will be *exalted*." Jesus thus condemns us because he sees how we choose the seats of honor, how we lust after recognition and praise, and how we justify ourselves because we're not as bad as "that guy." This is not the way of the kingdom of God.

Consider Jesus. The Son of God, begotten from eternity, the author and giver of life, ruling on high above all earthly authorities, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He gave away his seat of honor. He humbled himself, taking not only the lowest seat, but the position of the wait staff. He took on the form of a servant, a slave, a waiter (as it were). Jesus took on your human flesh, not to compete with you, but to serve you, to work for you, to suffer for you, and to die for you. He *humbled himself* in order to *lift you up*, giving *you* his place of honor.

He gave up his good reputation as a teacher of the Word by healing a man on the Sabbath. The prominent Jewish leaders decided that Jesus should not be counted among their ranks. He sullied his name because it was necessary to do so—not for himself, obviously, but for the man with dropsy: the man being killed by a swelling of water, the son fallen into a well. Jesus gave away his seat, his honor, and his reputation before men; he would not pridefully cling to these while his people were dying.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He also lost his reputation with God. Jesus became sin. His Father forsook him, punished him, turned his back on him, refused to help him in his hour of greatest need. His Father commanded this, in fact. He said, "Give up your place of honor, so that I can give it to the one whom I love: to Adam and Eve and their descendants. Give up your seat at the table so that they may be fed and glorified.” And so Jesus dies in the most shameful of ways, in the lowest place, stripped, beaten, ridiculed, in full view of the whole world. "Look at him, look at him! Hail the King of the Jews! Save yourself, if you can." But Jesus would not, because we needed him to die.

Now that Jesus’ place of glory has been vacated, we hear the Master of the banquet say: "Friend, move up higher. You beggar, you thief, you prostitute, and you Pharisee, move up higher. There is room for you. You are my honored guest. Come, sit in this seat next to me, my son."

Where pride ceases, faith clings to Jesus. Faith suffers with Christ in his death and is lifted up in his resurrection. The faithful know themselves to be the least of all and servant to all, just like their Lord. It is these humbled servants who will be exalted. As Mary, the mother of our Lord, proclaimed: "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts; he has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:51-52 / Magnificat).

Jesus did not come only to *rebuke* the Pharisees and call them to repentance. He also came to *save* them: to show them a path of humility in this life and exaltation in the next. He gives them a glimpse of the Kingdom of God, with its Sabbath rest and restoration which heals both dropsy and death. The Lord of heaven and earth is a friend to sinners. He exalts all who look to him to seats of honor at the heavenly banquet.

Dear friends in Christ, your pride is sin, and it will kill you. It will lift you up in your own mind upon its solid-looking foundation of *you*. But then it will come crashing down like a house of cards, leaving you to bear the full weight of the fall. Pride lifts you up, but it quickly crumbles. It promises, but it cannot deliver, because you are fallen.

Your pride will kill you. But Jesus' humility will save you. Though you fall, he will lift you up. He will give you, not only a seat at the table, but his own place of honor. “Friend, move up higher.” Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.