A Lesson in Humility

The text for the sermon today is our Gospel for today from Luke, Chapter 14, verses 1 to 14.

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

We’ve all been to dinner parties where there are both adults and children present. And unless it is for a group like Boy Scouts, where most troops make the boys go last, inevitably, the first in the line at any of these parties are the children, and thus also their parents, as children cannot wait to go through the line and get their meal. Now, I’m not criticizing children. It’s a part of being a child. I was the same way. And as a parent, you resign yourself to understanding that this is a part of how things work. And you are okay with it, because they are your child and you would do anything for them.

Another part of being a child is whenever you have a dinner there is almost always the ‘adult’ table and the ‘kids’ table. And while you’re a kid, you sit there and talk with one another, but you look forward to the day when you are told that you are old enough to now sit at the ‘adult’ table and can finally leave all the ‘little kids’ behind. Yet that is a move that you never make on your own, but always wait until you are invited up.

And if you are hosting a party for families, you know that the kids will never repay you. Their parents might invite you over. But they might not. It’s a simple fact of how things go. Children cannot repay you personally for what you’ve done, except by saying thank you. And that is all that one needs.

Our text deals with a similar relationship. Jesus has seemingly three different messages for us in today’s text, each of which deals on the surface with how we are to live and act with
one another in this world. But there is a deeper truth in each of these; a truth that runs throughout all of these and unites them. Today’s text also tells us how

GOD ACTS GENEROUSLY WITH THE HUMBLE.

I. Healing on the Sabbath

Our text begins, “One Sabbath, when Jesus went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching Him carefully. And behold, there was a man before Him who had dropsy.” Jesus went to eat at the house of the ruler of the Pharisees. We might think that this is weird, because Jesus and the Pharisees always stand opposed to one another. Yet, He had been invited and, even though the intent of the Pharisees was not right, Jesus is still going to use this opportunity to teach them yet again.

We know that the Pharisees intentions were not right because there just “coincidentally” happened to be a man with dropsy there also. This would not have happened had the Pharisees not wanted it to. A man having dropsy, better known as edema today, a disease which causes disfigurement to the body because of water retention, was ceremoniously unclean under Jewish law. Thus he is not someone whom the Pharisees, people who tried to keep the law to the T would normally have over. Yet they had him over so that they could carefully watch Jesus and determine what He would do. Would He heal him, or would He let him suffer, because it was the Sabbath?

And Jesus knows this, for our text continues, “And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?’ But they remained silent.” The lawyers and the Pharisees haven’t said a single word, yet Jesus knows what their asking in their hearts, for why else would this man be here. And the Pharisees were silent to His question. They did not have a response which they could give. If they said no, Jesus would easily refute it,
and if they said yes, then they would be contradicting their own position. So, they do the smart thing and remain silent.

And so Jesus does what Jesus always does; He heals and teaches. “Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” And they could not reply to these things.” The Pharisees had reached out to the man for their own narcissistic purposes; Jesus reaches out to the man in love, not for His own purpose, but for His Father’s purpose. And then Jesus asks them a question, and it hits a little too close to home. The Pharisees, when the question deals with the people and the things they love, cannot reply. The Greek there means literally, “They did not have the strength to reply.” The love that they would to show to their children, that you would show to your children, is the same type of love that our Father shows to us, when He sent His Only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to bear our sins and be our savior, by suffering on the cross, dying, and rising again on the third day, so that you may be healed from whatever afflicts you, and may have life in Him and have it in abundance.

II. The Seat of Honor

Our text then continues: “Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place.” This seems like common sense, and yet we all do it. We like to position ourselves closest to the power so that we can make it seem as if we too are important. We like being closest in on the action, not the farthest away from it. At our weddings today, there is still this idea of being closes versus farthest away. The head table typically constitutes of the wedding party, and
then, if it is assigned seating, they people go back from there in a sense of importance. But if it is not assigned, inevitably the first tables to try to get filled up are the ones closest to the Bride and Groom, so that they can see you. Yet this isn’t about simply how you should sit at a wedding party, but how you are to live your life. The one who thinks that he or she is superior to their fellow man fails to notice his or her own sin, which makes all equal, for all die because of sin.

But the message that Jesus has is the exact opposite of that. “But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Jesus says to assume the lowest place, the place farthest away, and then be asked to move up, instead of assuming the highest spot and be asked to move back. But Jesus doesn’t just say this; His life is a life of showing this truth by example. Both St. Matthew and St. Mark record Jesus saying, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus, although He was God, did not assume the highest spot, as the master, but instead came as a servant. He demonstrated this clearly in the upper room, where, as St. John records, he washed the disciples’ feet. Yet the clearest example of this is when at the cross, a place for common criminals, He was hung, cleansing you from all sins, even those of pride and self-exultation, and giving you the seat of honor in His kingdom, which has no end.

III. The Invitation List

And had our text ended there, that would have been ok. But Jesus has one more command for the people there. “He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.” There is nothing wrong
with inviting over the people who are dearest to you for a dinner or banquet. Jesus isn’t saying that. It is all about the heart and humility. Do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, because if you do so, you will expect repayment.

“But,” Jesus continues, “when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Here is another reversal through humility. Invite those who cannot repay you, for then you will be repaid at the resurrection, at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb and His Kingdom which has no end. And a taste of that meal is yours today, given for you in, with and under the bread and wine. When we partake of the Lord’s precious body and blood, we are in Holy Communion with the Lamb and with all the saints who have gone before us. It is a meal given to you, the poor in spirit, the ones crippled and lame by this life, who have been blinded by sin, free of charge, with no need of repayment, for there is nothing that we can do to repay it. Christ did it all.

At my field work congregation, a couple months ago, as we were doing communion, the pastor blessed one of the babies being carried in her mother’s arms, and as he did so, the baby got this huge grin across her face, as if she knew that the word’s he spoke were not his words, but from Christ Himself. May you have that type of faith today, knowing that the words said are not from man, but from God Himself. Amen.

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.