

August 28, 2016
Luke 14:1-14

Proper 17C
The Exalted Life

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever had the opportunity to be in first class? Maybe it's flying on an airplane. Maybe it's been at a French restaurant. Maybe you've taken a cruise and you've been given all the special treatment in the multicourse meal at your assigned table and time. Living life in those first class moments is great. But when you walk out, you for a moment realize your station in life and may not like it. You probably would rather be treated first class all the time.

Our culture doesn't spend a great deal of time on the topic of stations in life, we still, almost out of nature, evaluate ourselves in light of the people around us and determine where we fit in the different social realms of work, home, school, the teams we are on, and even yes in the church. Usually we don't like it! And that means we are consumed with the drive to advance our station in life. As our thoughts focus on ways to promote self, take care of self, and protect self, we discover that we've fallen into the pit of self-exaltation.

In our text, the Pharisees are right there with us. They are trying to trap Jesus...but first

The opening phrase in our text sets the ominous tone. Jesus is invited one Sabbath Day to dine with a prominent Pharisee. The text says, "They were watching Him carefully." The "they" – enemies of Jesus – later revealed as the Pharisees, Elders, and teachers of the Law. Imagine a conversation between the disciples as they were walking with Jesus to the house. They were feeling good. After all, several times they debated who is great in the Kingdom of God. Now Jesus gets invited to the house of a prominent Pharisee. Finally, Jesus made it with the in crowd. With the noises of life, the ordinary of life all around them, they are entering into their first class moment. They were about to be wined and dined in this home. But perhaps they didn't see scrutiny of the trap this was or if they did they knew Jesus would overcome. The text tells us that Jesus was walking and they were watching, waiting for the trip to close around Him.

What was the trap? The better question, Who was the trap? "Behold, there was a man who had dropsy." Dropsy refers to someone who has an excess of fluid that builds up in one part of the body. Some commentators suggest that this was a condition that formed at the result of sexual immorality. I imagine the Pharisees planted this guy. After all, it's the Sabbath Day. To the letter of the law, it's illegal to do any work on the Sabbath. There's the movement of Jesus, the watchful eye of the Pharisees. Jesus looks at the man in need and responds to the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not.' But they remained silent."

In fact, they were more than muted at this point, they were blind. They thought they could see things clearly, but in all reality, they were blind.

They didn't see a man in need, they saw a trap for Jesus. They were asking – "Is he going to heal on the Sabbath? Will he heal someone who is suffering because of sin and guilt? Isn't God punishing me, so who are we to interfere?"

In blindness, they looked, but didn't see. Self-exaltation blinded them. Their zeal to be better became their downfall. This man was not an object lesson on the importance of the Law, rather a faceless bait for their trap. Jesus saw through it all. He saw the man for who He was: a precious child of God in need, suffering the misery and shame of his condition. Jesus healed the man and sent him away asking the Pharisees this question: "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."

Jesus saw a man who may not have been seen for years because of his condition. In compassion for this broken man, Jesus spoke words of life and healing. To be healed, what a marvelous gift, but to be seen as a child of the Most High was of more importance. Our drive to exalt ourselves blinds us to the needs of others around us. It breaks our sense of community as we fail to notice and care for the needs of others.

How have you done that? Who have you not noticed in the grocery store, at the gas pump or in the mall or even right here at Church? Who have you missed an opportunity to share Christ's love with? Do you see and not perceive? I know I have failed many times. Self-exaltation seems to offer much: Strive to be the greatest, and you can achieve great things. In striving for greatness, we experience brokenness with our fellow man.

The next two events come in the form of parables. These parables don't include a farmer, builder or a servant. In these parables you are the main character. The first of these two parables focuses on self-exalting yourself and sitting at the prime position at the feast and becoming a great embarrassment when the host of the party tells you to move the lowest seat. You will move with great shame.

When we exalt ourselves, we lose the ability to see ourselves for who we are. This lack of perspective sets us up to be humiliated. You know what I'm talking about. You've seen kind of person in action...maybe in school, at work, or yes...in the church. They are quick to take credit for things they didn't do. The thing is that everyone sees through the self-exalting efforts, but the person thinks or he or she has gotten away with. That is until one day when something happens and the total of the efforts at self-promotion collapses around them because someone who sees him or her for what he or she is speak a painful yet truthful word. The person in this parable took the seat of honor because he didn't see his own imperfections. Sadly, by taking the seat of honor, he missed an opportunity to be honored with a better seat. Isn't it true, that when we try to make ourselves look better than we are in the eyes of others, we end up looking worse. Self-exaltation always results in brokenness—brokenness in our identity.

Jesus uses another parable to describe the third brokenness of self-exaltation. You again are the center of attention. The parable is simple and the message profound. Jesus challenges us:

“When you give a feast, don’t invite your friends for dinner knowing they will repay you. Invite someone who can’t repay you.” This isn’t a casual bbq in the backyard. This is a party...a celebration. You’ve got something to celebrate, a job promotion, a wedding, a birth of a child, a graduation. You want to celebrate, you want to throw a party and you need to people to join in your celebration. But who?

Typically, you choose, your boss...to get some brownie points. You invite your family and friends. They might even do the same in return. You gain prestige but risk few resources.

While we can recognize the need to notice people and the dangers of self-exaltation. We struggle with this parable. Many believe Jesus went a bit too far. We may not say it, but the fact that we enjoy that multi-course meal as we are wined and dined and if we had the chance to give our seat, we don’t, demonstrates our discomfort at this particular challenge. Even my view of hospitality is broken that the very thing that Jesus says not to do is the normal and the thing he tells me to do seems crazy.

The truth of this parable is that Self-exaltation is nothing less than idolatry. It is an idolatry that has broken our relationship with God, community, identity, and true hospitality.

The main verse of our text gives us an opportunity as much as a challenge. There’s a warning and a promise: *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

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.¹

¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”²

¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”³

Humility begins with realization that we are wrong in our thinking and rebellious in our practice. Oh, but this too, can become a practice in self-exaltation. My repentance...you know the agony of repentance from last week can become my attempts to better myself in the eyes of God and others. After all, the heart of repentance depends solely on Christ.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Lk 14:10). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Lk 14:13–14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Lk 14:11). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

The separation of self-exaltation is defeated by Christ. Ephesians 2:12-14 is a declaration of certainty. In Christ our brokenness is healed, and no longer separated from God. ¹² *Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.* ¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* ¹⁴ *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.*⁴

Jesus Christ humbled Himself. He did come to dine first class. He came to be a servant of all, that through his perfect sacrifice on the cross, the brokenness of sin of the First Adam might be done away with.

The driving force of self-exaltation is defeated in Christ. With his blood, Christ has healed the brokenness that separates us from God and from one another. In addition, he has given us freedom from the very thing that drives us to self-exaltation: fear. Peter writes: ⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,* ⁷ *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*⁵ Notice that it is our anxiety that fights against humility. We strive to exalt ourselves because we are afraid of others looking down on us; we are afraid of being weak; we are afraid of missing out. In place of fear that leads to brokenness and separation, God gives us faith and perfect love. St. John writes in his first epistle, "Perfect love casts out fear." Never again need we fear being overlooked and unloved, for by his death and resurrection Christ honored us with every good thing.

My prayer is that, as you leave today in God's perfect love and promised provision for life, you will embrace the newfound community we have in Christ. You will embrace your newfound community as you notice people, their needs and hopes. You will embrace your newfound community as you walk in the new identity you have in Christ. You will embrace your newfound community as you strive to practice radical hospitality that reflects the Father's unconditional love.

This is the new we. We can lift up those in need, because Christ has said to each of us who have been in coach class on the airplane or living life on the outside of the cruise ship or whose never been wined and dined before, "Friend, move up higher!"

In Jesus name. Amen.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Eph 2:12–14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (1 Pe 5:6–7). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.