**Sermon for Proper 17-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

08-31-25

Luke 14:1–14

At some time or another, you’ve probably attended a dinner where the seating was assigned. Perhaps you’ve arranged such a dinner, and so, you can appreciate all of the planning that goes into it. Who to invite, and where shall each one be seated?

Once the guest list is made, the names are moved around until a satisfactory seating arrangement is in place; one in which, if all goes as planned, lively conversations will ensue, new bonds will be formed, and old ones strengthened, and a good time will be had by all.

A prominent Pharisee invited Jesus to such a dinner party at his home. The seating arrangement was definitely planned; at least for two of the people there. Only, the agenda was not for a lively and pleasant evening.

In addition to Jesus, and several members of the sect of the Pharisees, a man with dropsy was also invited, and the host made sure that he would be seated right in front of Jesus.

The agenda behind this particular dinner party was to find something with which to discredit Jesus, and the Pharisees were aware that Jesus was known for healing people.

Jesus had healed the blind, the deaf, and the crippled. He had cast out demons, and even raised people from the dead. While these were miracles, we know of charlatans who have promoted themselves as faith healers, performing their so-called miracles on the allegedly handicapped or possessed. These things are easily staged.

With enough planning, one might even fool people into believing that they’d brought someone who was dead back to life. Such con artists certainly were around in Jesus’ day as well.

But, dropsy is not a condition that one can fake. The body is terribly swollen from excessive fluid retention, especially the legs. Imagine trying to walk with a couple of 5 gallon buckets of water strapped to your legs, while also not being able to take a full breath, because of the fluid in your lungs; that’s the condition known as dropsy.

The Pharisees brought this man with dropsy, and sat him right in front of Jesus, to see if Jesus could actually heal him, or if he would dare to heal him, during the sabbath; a day when no work was to be done.

They figured that they would either expose Jesus as a fraud, or witness him violate the sabbath laws against doing work.

Of course, not only could Jesus heal the man, he did. Without hesitation, Jesus took hold of the man with dropsy, and immediately, he was cured; the swelling was gone.

How could witnessing this not convert the entire room to repent and believe that Jesus is the Messiah? Yet, the majority of the Pharisees remained unmoved. Their only thought was “We’ve got him now; he has violated the Sabbath laws; He’s no rabbi; he’s leading the people astray.”

But then, Jesus asked them a 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?” 6And they could not reply to these things.*

They could not reply to these things, because in this question, they were convicted of their own hypocrisy. Saving a person’s life; or even the life of an animal, on the Sabbath, is not so wrong after all; so much for their case against him.

Doing good on the Sabbath is no violation; for God desires mercy, and not sacrifice. The hard-hearted Pharisees never grasped this, because they were caught up in fulfilling the law.

But the law is not merciful; the law, properly understood, only reveals to us our fatal disease; the sin that has infected us, body and soul, and ultimately, results in our death.

The Pharisees were proud of themselves; too proud to recognize their sinful state; too proud to be humbled by the truth of Jesus’ teachings, and too proud to recognize that they were in the very presence of the Lord.

How often do we, perhaps, like the Pharisees, get a little too big for our britches? How often do we forget that we are not as superior to others as we make ourselves out to be?

We take it upon ourselves to pass judgment on others, but our judgments are flawed and far from perfect. Jesus Christ is the perfect judge, yet he is ever humble, and patient toward us; we, who deserve from him no patience or mercy whatsoever.

The Pharisees figured that they were entitled to the most honored seats, even in heaven itself. Jesus’ parable of the dinner guest being set down in his proper place is a warning to them, and to us as well, not to be so presumptuous.

Like the Pharisees, many assume that they are entitled to a seat at the Lord’s table because they are so very special, when the fact of the matter is, only by the grace of God, are we even invited to the feast.

Unlike the ways of the world, in which people tend to act on the basis of reciprocity; giving something in order to get something in return, Jesus Christ acts toward us only out of perfect love and undeserved mercy.

He gives us eternal life in place of eternal judgment, taking our fatal disease, that is, our sin, upon himself, and making us well, at the cost of his own horrible suffering and death. His resurrection shows that he is the victor over sin, over all of our diseases, and even death itself.

Having restored us to himself through his own precious blood, he invites us to be with him, though we can never repay him for his kindnesses to us.

He calls us to imitate him in a life of humble service toward others out of love, motivated by the love that he has bestowed upon us.

This does not come to us naturally, but the new spirit within us; the Holy Spirit, who calls us to repentance and faith, is the same Spirit who moves us to bear fruits of faith; good works, springing from thankfulness for the salvation that we have been given, through Jesus Christ.

A humble, Christlike life is not the product of our own efforts. These only make us either fret because we are so aware of how completely sinful we are, or self-righteous, under the pharisaic illusion that we are examples of holiness to everyone around us, and no one should dare to challenge our exemplary life.

Only faith in Jesus Christ, the true perfect one, and his complete sacrificial atonement for us, is the foundation of a life that grows in his grace to reflect him, more and more, in love toward others.

Let us, then, with humility and thankfulness, feast together upon his word and sacraments, and all good things that our Lord has given to us, and encourage each other, in this life of faith that we share. Amen.