

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Proverbs 25:6-7

Psalms 112

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Luke 14:1, 7-14

8/28/2022

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

1 On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

7 When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9 and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. 10 But when you are invited, go and sit down at 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 the table with you. 11 For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." 12 He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

14And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

The Gospel of Our Lord

### **Prayer**

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

Amen.

### **Embarrassment**

Good morning! I hate being embarrassed. But, unfortunately, it seems to happen to me a lot. Today, you will hear of one such example. As many of you know, I was a Younglife leader in my hometown throughout college. One of the highlights of the year is going to camp. Now, Younglife camp is on a whole other level, the facilities are amazing, the food is great, and everything is top notch. I had a motley crew of high school young men under my care, and the week was going fantastic. We made it to the end of the week with very little drama, and we were all set to go home the next day. I went to bed that night without a care in the world.

Now here is the thing you need to understand about me... I'm a light sleeper. As in, the smallest little noise can wake me up. My poor wife walks around the house in the morning like a ninja and I still wake up. Nothing can get by my hearing. Or at least that's what I thought. Because it turns out that when I'm suitably exhausted, like say at the end of the week of watching over a rag-tag group of high schoolers, I can just pass out completely and not notice anything, even when that something is happening to me.

So I woke up the next morning, started waking the guys in the cabin up, only to notice some snickering. The laughing got louder and louder, all the while they stared at me. My first thought was my beard. I felt along my

chin, noticing that it was all still there. Next I assumed they took a chunk out of my hair, but it was all in place too. And then I felt a prickly little spot above my eye... my eyebrows were gone. Somehow, as I slept, one of them shaved my eyebrow off with a razor, no shaving cream, and a great deal of time. Honestly, they were just as amazed as I was that I somehow didn't wake up. The initial embarrassment was overwhelming. I looked like some crazed madman. I did get over it, hair grows back after all, but I was forced to suffer strange looks everywhere I went for about the next two months. Whenever someone met me or looked at me, they would make eye contact, and then just for a second, break away as they looked up at my non-existent eyebrows and then back down to my eyes.

Now, if you think my embarrassment was severe when I lost my eyebrows, it has nothing on the social and cultural implications that would have been attached to Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet and the guest who aspires to a seat higher than their station. It comes about naturally, Jesus is invited to a meal at the house of a leader of the Pharisees. As they were carefully watching him to see how he would behave, Jesus was also watching them, and after he notices how they fight for the places of honor, he tells them our parable. As is often the case, what Jesus says isn't anything new, he simply reminds them of what they have forgotten. Proverbs, the book in the Hebrew Scriptures is full of reminders of the danger of arrogance and importance of humility.<sup>1</sup> But, sometimes we need a reminder. Jesus tells them two parables, both lessons focusing on turning the current cultural assumptions upside down.

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, Volume 4*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.p. 23.

In the Gospel of Luke we spend a lot of time focusing on meals. As one scholar writes *“the Jesus of Luke’s Gospel is certainly preoccupied with eating. Not only does he imply that some think he is a glutton and drunkard; there are in Luke more references to eating, banquets, tables, and reclining at tables than in any of the other Gospels.”*<sup>2</sup> But Jesus uses the meal as means for example of the changes that God is ushering in. This is because the meal was a very important part of society in the first century. It’s so much more than eating for sustenance.

The meal, the table, at a banquet, these were all places where the pecking order was established. Now, I need you to understand what was at stake here. I’m sure we can all conceptualize an important business meal, but so much more was going on. In the first century, your literal life was dependent on a system of patronage. It’s like this, at the top was the Emperor. From his place of power all those below him would give him fealty and loyalty. The emperor would then give political, social, and literal protection to those that showed him respect. The elite of society would function in much the same way to those of lower stations, working its way down to the lowest of the low. If your patron let you go, or if you did something to displease them, you risked becoming an outcast, maybe even losing your life when rivals realized you were no longer under the protection of someone higher up. Each person knew where they stood in relation to one another, and each was hoping for a chance to climb higher. Anyone able to host a meal for a large group was intentional to invite those that could help further those aspirations, helping them climb the ladder.

So when Jesus suggests ignoring the code, sitting lower, and inviting a group that would literally give you no social advantage, it’s like he grew a

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

second head. Carolyn J. Sharp, a professor from Yale Divinity School, writes *“The radical hospitality centered in Luke’s theology of feasting should not be understood simply as a glimpse of God’s eschatological banquet. Rather, Jesus’ exhortation to host ‘the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind’ constitutes a strong political challenge to the finely calibrated reciprocity governing social interactions under Roman imperialism. Countering oppressive social and economic norms is core to the gospel as Luke presents it.”*<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is proposing a whole new system, one in which meals are not places of social pressure and expectation, but places where we humble ourselves, looking for the best in others, inviting those that need a meal the most. A friend from Camp Luther, the one with not so nice accommodations in the middle of nowhere WV, helped run a once a week meal for those who needed some food. But she did something that I’ve always thought gave us a glimpse of what Jesus was showing us here in the Gospel of Luke. When my friend Sarah started helping out, it was like most feeding ministries. The volunteers stayed in the kitchen or serving area, dishing out the meals to the poor and homeless. This drove her nuts, and so things changed. Eventually it changed into a meal where the poor and homeless sat down with the volunteers from the congregation, along with anyone else from the community that wanted to show up, to have a meal together. It was important for Sarah that the food was good too. Everything was delicious and ready and plated so that the volunteers no longer had a barrier between them and those they were serving. All were equal, they ate

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-22-3/commentary-on-luke-141-7-14-5>

together, laughed together, and gave us all a glimpse of what God is making possible.

I think that is why the sacrament of Holy Communion remains such a central part of our worship. During the pandemic, we sat in our homes longing for the grace and healing that meal provided. We missed it, that time together, around that table, stripped of our titles, our pasts, of any obligation other than coming humbly before God. As I said earlier, it's easy for us to forget the lessons that God is trying to teach us. So let us remember Jesus' call to care for those that can give us nothing in return. *"But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you..."* Amen.