

Luke 14:1-14
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 31, 2025

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

“But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, Jesus called *not* the faceless masses and the ‘many out there’ to repentance; he called *you* to repentance! And, as we said, that call to repentance was a call to *safety*. A safety in regards to what? – in regards to not missing out on the heavenly feast, at which the multitudes will come from the east and the west, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the blest – the feast of the Lord’s salvation.

And, if that’s true in *eternity*, it’s also true *today*. Or, if you will, if it’s true in a future that is still (so to speak) theoretical, it’s also true, and the promise is to be lived in and “practiced,” today.

To say it another way: Especially in Luke’s gospel, we often see Jesus *teach* regarding a doctrinal truth, then suddenly that very teaching is being *manifest* in something that happens between Jesus and the people.

So, is it any coincidence that the focus of today’s text (on the heels of the teaching regarding the heavenly feast)... the focus of today’s text and the context of that moment in history is a feast, is

dining with Jesus. Jesus puts into practice what he had just preached, and he builds on it; just as this morning he has us gather around his altar that we may *dine* with him.

In fact, it's that weekly celebration that takes center stage at the beginning of the text, isn't it? In the context of the feast, a miracle of healing. But that miraculous healing of the sinner elicits a debate about the weekly celebration: Is the **Sabbath** for the keeping of the Law, or is it for the grace of God?

How does that tie in to last week? Didn't Jesus warn that the impenitent would *assume* they deserved a place next to Jesus because of their keeping of the Law – “We ate in your presence, you taught in our streets” – and in their impenitent pride they would be stunned when Jesus responded, “I don't know you. You do not belong at the feast.”

So also in our text for this morning: It's as if Jesus says, “You who want to live by the Law have no joy in this healing because you assume you are those who are safe in the *Law*. **You don't want mercy; you want merit!** You are like the one who pontificates, ‘Will those who are saved (namely, ‘us’) be few?’ But,” Jesus says, “the sinner who knows his need rejoices in Christ being merciful on the Sabbath... would rather have *Christ's mercy* than try to appeal to one's own merit, supposed righteousness according to the Law.”

Because Christ knows the need of his poor sheep, he immediately pulls them *up* and *out* of how far they have fallen,

whatever trap or snare of sin they have fallen into... that's the question he poses to the legalists, isn't it? He does not mark the Sabbath as a day of Law, but of rescue... not as a day of self-*righteousness*, but as *safety* for the dear sheep in the presence of their Good Shepherd.

Now, whether people recognize this truth of their relationship with God is easily discerned by how they take their seat at the table. Do they choose the place of honor because they assume they deserve it? Then they live by the Law and their supposed righteousness ...and will be embarrassed and put to shame when the Law and the *truly* Righteous One highlight their sin. OR, do they choose the lowest place, for they know they are unworthy. They do not self-righteously pontificate about others' sins; rather, they feel the sin, they feel the weight, the burden, the shame of their sin. And, they know – if they are being honest – they have no reason to be invited to the table at all.

In the Small Catechism's section on the Sacrament of the Altar, the final question asks who is worthy and well-prepared to come to the Sacrament. And, in our Catechism classes, I teach the hearer to paraphrase the answer to that question this way, "The one who is worthy and well-prepared is the one who confesses he is *not* worthy." There is your lot. Deserving not even the lowest seat at the table. Not trying to weasel out of that truth as if your unworthiness is an *excuse*... not saying, "I'm not worthy *and I don't care*," nor (on

the other hand) saying, “My false piety of grumbling how unworthy I am will show the Lord how truly worthy I am.” No; it’s not about being righteously penitent *enough*. But, genuinely recognizing in the heart, “I am not worthy.” True. But, “worthy is Christ”... and *he* invites you, “Come, eat and drink without price.”

Notice, it’s the truly worthy One, the truly noble One who hosts this meal and with whom we unworthy desire to dine. The whole text of our Gospel reading is all about dining with Jesus. The first paragraph sets forth that the grace of God is the true purpose of such sabbath (divine rest); the second paragraph of our text sets forth that the invited ought recognize such unmerited mercy behind such gracious invitation; and the third paragraph sets forth that the one who hosts – Christ himself – invites not based on your merit, but your need:

“When you give a feast,” he says to the man who serves as a comparison with Christ himself, “invite the poor the crippled, the lame, the blind.” Invite those in need; those who can’t help but recognize their need. That’s Jesus calling sinners, isn’t it? And, what is the response of those who rejoice at such mercy? Do they not *bless* the Lord: “Blessed is he, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” And, again, in the festal hymn of Revelation (which we know as “This is the Feast”), “**Blessing**, honor, glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever.”

Yes, the spiritually poor and needy bless the Lord, just as Jesus says to the host of the meal (who is to teach us to see Christ): “You will be blessed (blessed *by their praises*)” – why? – “because they cannot repay you.”

Instead, what is Christ’s payment, what is his glory? – “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” There’s his joy. That’s why he has worked so tirelessly from the moment of that first gospel proclamation in Eden... that’s his *true joy* – “for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the Father”... and he serves His people now in eager anticipation of, and to keep them sustained and focused on, the resurrection of the just.

There is the reason to dine with Christ each Sunday – to be strengthened unto life everlasting (the resurrection of the just!). The one who says, “I don’t *need* this Sabbath rest,” Christ will cast away such self-righteous in the judgment. Another who says, “Such merciful Sabbath rest bores me,” such lukewarm indifference Christ will spit out of his mouth. And, by so doing, He will exalt the humble and humble the exalted. Or, as said to close last week’s text, “Some who are last (at least in their own minds) will be first, and some who are first (at least in their own minds) will be last.”

Sometimes, though, we sinners try too hard to humble ourselves... as if a reverse-psychology against our God!, making sure we’re last so that Christ will make us first! – it’s a fake poverty, a

pretend humility... we think, “If I wallow more deeply than anyone else, the Lord will see my great ‘last-ness’ and make me first. Oh, chief of sinners, chief of sinners!” we cry.

How silly! Do you not have the greatest reason for joy! Does the host delight in your sour mood at his banqueting table, and all the guests having to hear your deep groaning of how you shouldn’t be here? What a killjoy! No, the Sabbath is a day of rest and gladness and joy! For we, though most undeserving, are most privileged to dine with Christ! To now make it about you and your deep humility is just a pietistic form of self-righteousness. And nobody enjoys such dinner conversation!

Instead, as Christ has exalted you to his table, there is nothing better this side of heaven. For you know that your place is only because of God’s grace and only because He is mindful of you. For, how often does He resolutely claim that He alone passes judgment on who is to be invited!

Two of those occasions are found in the other Scriptural meditations for the day. Our Introit’s refrain sets the theme: “It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting another!” Now, that verse by itself may be thematic; but hear it in context of the psalm, for our introit rearranges the verses. The true order is found this way:

First, the Lord declares, “At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity!” (How often do we hear that the bridegroom comes and the marriage feast is set to begin!)

Then, in the same psalm, the text expounds, “For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up...” In other words, those coming from east and west to feast on the Lord’s salvation – they have nothing to bring with them that would uplift them to a seat of honor. Rather, those who trust the goodness of the host come flocking – a multitude come from the east and the west, the north and the south, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the blest (blest not in his own person, but – passively – blessed by God!) – that whole multitude streams in, hanging on the trustworthiness of the host’s Word and the certainty of his gracious invitation... so that all the faithful joyfully confess the *next* verse of that psalm we’ve been piecing together in proper order... and the final thought of those verses is our introit’s refrain, the joyful refrain of God’s people: “It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.”

But that’s not the only Old Testament meditation on this scene today. Look at our first Reading, from Proverbs. Listen to the wisdom of the proverb:

“Take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness” – How do you do that? How do you take wickedness away so as to ensure his throne is

established in righteousness? By self-confidence in your own righteousness and therefore stubborn impenitence that will lead to condemnation? Or by repentance that flees to and hides in the truly Righteous One... the repentance thereby (through that Righteous One's bloody substitution) leading to forgiveness, the safe division of the sinner from his sin? And, if forgiveness, what is left but the purity of his throne established in righteousness!

“Take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness.” The Proverb continues: **“Do not put *yourself* forward in the king’s presence or stand in the place of the *great*, for it is better to be told, ‘Come up here,’ than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.”** And, who is the noble one?... the *Noble* Shepherd? ... the Good and faithful and loving and self-sacrificing Shepherd is Christ...Who leads you not to a Sabbath of Legal resting requirements coaxing you toward your own righteousness, but Who leads you to the Sabbath rest in green pastures ...and the divine feasting at His table spread anew... and the cup that runneth over with His righteousness?

How do you approach each Sunday? Do you yawn at the supposed legal requirement because you're pretty sure you're one of the few that deserve a high place at the table? Or, do you rejoice that, though you are deeply unworthy of even the lowest seat, you are extended the most gracious invitation to have a seat with your

dear brothers and sisters, to bless the Lord, extol His praise, and
partake with and of Him who is both host and feast?

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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