

# Sermon for The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

**Date:** September 1, 2019

**Location:** St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

**Old Testament:** Proverbs 25:2-10

**Epistle Reading:** Hebrews 13:1-17

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 14:1-14

**Sermon Text:** Luke 14:1-14

**Sermon Title:** God's Ladder of Success

**Introit:** Psalm 75:1-2, 6, 9; Antiphon Psalm 75:7

## Hymns:

LSB 907 – God Himself is Present

LSB 761 – Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

LSB 791 – All People that on Earth Do Dwell

## Distribution:

LSB 637 – Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord

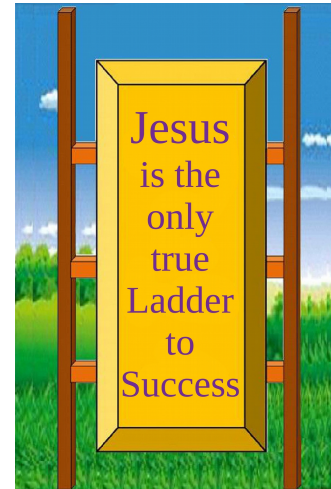
LSB 813 – Rejoice O Pilgrim Throng

## Liturgy:

Divine Service: Divine Service I, p. 151



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## **Text: Luke 14:1-14**

On a day of rest, a holy day, Jesus went to eat at the home of a prominent Pharisee. The guests were watching Jesus very closely. A man whose body was swollen with fluid was there. Jesus reacted by asking the Pharisees and the experts in Moses' Teachings, "Is it right to heal on the day of rest or not?" They didn't say a thing. So Jesus took hold of the man, healed him, and sent him away. Jesus asked them, "If your son or your ox falls into a well on a day of rest wouldn't you pull him out immediately?" They couldn't argue with him about this.

Then Jesus noticed how the guests always chose the places of honor. So he used this illustration when he spoke to them. "When someone invites you to a wedding don't take the place of honor. Maybe someone more important than you was invited. Then your host would say to you, 'Give this person your place.' Embarrassed, you would have to take the place of least honor. So when you're invited take the place of least honor. Then when your host comes he will tell you, 'Friend, move to a more honorable place.' Then all the other guests will see how you are honored. Those who honor themselves will be humbled but people who humble themselves will be honored."

Then he told the man who had invited him, "When you invite people for a dinner or a banquet don't invite only your friends, family, other relatives or rich neighbors. They will return the favor. Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the handicapped, the lame and the blind. Then you will be blessed because they don't have any way to pay you back. You will be paid back when those who have God's approval come back to life."

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Grace, peace and God's eternal mercy be yours in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm sure many of you have gone to a parade. People jockey for the "good seats." You know those in the shade or at the best corner. Sometimes people will get to their location early to ensure they get to sit exactly where they want to; where they have sat every year since they were very young.

There are other times when people want to "get there early." From time to time you will see on the news where some big name band, or well know singer, is coming to town, and people will camp out for tickets. They want to be the first in line. They've got to buy the very first ticket. Sometimes people will get there days in advance. I've heard of someone camping out at the box office for seven days. Seven days of their lives spent waiting for a concert ticket.

There are other events that people will attend, often for some political event or special fund raiser. They have a special speaker and charge \$10,000 or more per plate. In my short ministry I can tell you that I am not aware of anyone camping outside the church for a week just to hear me preach, and I'm quite sure no one has, or ever will, pay \$10,000 just to hear me talk to them. That's probably good.

The only possible similarities are perhaps Christmas and Easter. Those are days when Christians get up a little earlier, drive a little faster and get to their seats a little sooner, to make sure they get their seat, which often is near the back of church. We good Lutherans know very well that the front rows are for special occasions, or only for show. They are not for regular every Sunday use.

Those who are unfamiliar with the finer points of our worship style may conclude, quite unfairly, that people sit in the back of the church because, if the sermon is boring, the pastor won't be able to see them sleeping. That is not why good Lutherans sit in the back.

Some think churches fill in from the back because the worshipers want to watch, gossip and criticize all the other people who are arriving. That also is not the reason. I've even heard critics of Lutheran worshipers say people sit in the back so they can be close to the door. That way, after the service is over, they can make a hasty escape and get home in time to watch the game, or at the very least, get to coffee shop before the Catholics. That, however, is also not the reason Lutherans sit in the back of church.

So why do Lutherans sit in the back of the church? The answer is: Lutherans know their Bible and they have read Luke chapter 14. There Jesus had been invited for Sabbath Day dinner at the home of a Pharisee. People who were invited, especially the snobbish Pharisees, were keeping a close eye on Him.

Jesus didn't have to be omniscient to realize He was being inspected and scrutinized. Perhaps, in part, that is why He did a little inspecting of His own. As these men had been coming in for dinner Jesus noticed how they had been jockeying and jostling to get a good seat at the table. Each of them wanted to make sure he was getting his fair due; each wanted to be certain he got every bit of honor he deserved. You see in those days the closer you sat to the head of the table, the more important you were. The most important person always sat on the right side of the host.

Seeing this bit of foolishness Jesus told a parable. He said something like this: When you get invited to a wedding, I would encourage you to find a seat by the kitchen door, or behind a post. Pick a spot that nobody else wants. That way when the host sees you behind the post he's going to come up to you and say, "What are you doing here? You're an important person. Come, get a seat up here."

Jesus stated, that is a whole lot better than sitting at the head of the table and having the host come up and say, "Just what do you think you're doing here? This spot is reserved for the important people. You go over there and get a sit behind that post?"

Jesus explained His story with the comment:

Those who honor themselves will be humbled,  
but people who humble themselves will be honored.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' point was simple. God's people should be humble. Now that kind of thinking flies in the face of just about everything we know in our culture. Go to any library and they can show you shelf after shelf filled with books that tell you how to be the best at just about anything you can think of. If you go over to the music section of a store and you might find that Country/Western song by Mac Davis. The chorus goes:

Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble.  
When you're perfect in every way.  
I can't wait to look in the mirror.  
Cause I get better lookin' each day...

However, if you look for the "How To Be Humble" section, you'll leave the building empty handed.

Some time after the world was created Satan decided he wanted to be number one and tried to overthrow God Himself. When he failed at that he convinced Adam and Eve that eating the forbidden fruit would make them number one, right

1 Luke 14:11

up there with their Creator. Pick a sin any sin at all, it doesn't make much difference. prejudice, hatred, theft, greed, envy, they all have their beginnings in sinful human hearts which say, "I want to be number one and I'm willing to do whatever is necessary to get and hold on to that spot." That can be a dangerous thing to do.

What Jesus wants for us is, in honest humility, to acknowledge God as the giver of every good and perfect gift. He wants us to recognize that everything we are comes from Him. He is the one who has made us, preserves us, enables us, strengthens and saves us. If, by His grace and wishes, we do become the best at anything we need to humbly acknowledge, He is the one who has given us that ability. Saint James said it this way:

Humble yourself before the Lord  
and He will lift you up.<sup>2</sup>

With those words God lets us know that He has a different ladder of success than the rest of the world. We are humble because it's right, not because of any reward we will get. We are humble because that is what Jesus has asked us to be. He showed us that by His own example.

Look in God's Word and you will see the Son of God living in humility. Paul wrote:

[Jesus] emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, by becoming like other humans, by having a human appearance. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, death on a cross. This is why God has given him an exceptional honor – the name honored above all other names – so that at the name of Jesus everyone in Heaven, on Earth, and in the world below, will kneel and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus humbled Himself so you would be lifted up. He was falsely accused and convicted so that on Judgment Day you would be found innocent. Because of what Jesus has done, because Jesus has humbly kept the Law we sinfully broke; because Jesus would not accept Satan's suggestions to set aside the suffering; because Jesus was willing to die the death that our pride and arrogance earned; because Jesus did that I am able to say that anyone who believes in Him as their perfect substitute is saved.

<sup>2</sup> James 4:10

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 2:7-11

Now I should address the fact that there are a lot of Christians who are as proud and selfish as anybody else. In fact some people stay away from churches because they say, “They are filled with hypocrites.” Why should someone believe in a humble Jesus when He doesn’t produce any humble followers?

I suppose we have all known people like that. I heard of one elderly church lady who was so full of herself she thought she should get a personal invitation to the church picnic from her pastor. When she didn’t get it, she was furious. When the pastor was informed he called her up and tried to calm her down. She would have none of it.

She said, “Pastor, your words aren’t going to do any good. Not now. You don’t want me there, fine. I’ve already prayed for rain.”

I suppose we’ve all met folks like that, in the church and out, but as a pastor, working and seeing what goes on behind the scenes, I can tell you I’ve seen far far more of “the others.”

I’ve seen teenagers visiting the elderly, and men in their suits shoveling the church sidewalks early on a snowy Sunday. I’ve seen people volunteering to teach Sunday school. I’ve seen a widow picking up broken glass from a playground. I’ve seen children make sure everyone in their class gets a valentine; and I’ve seen coaches make sure all the kids get to play in a tournament game, at the risk of the championship. I’ve seen “the others.” For those of you who haven’t seen these “others” well, you wouldn’t, would you? These people don’t show off and brag about themselves. What they do, and they are here sitting among you today, they do in quiet Christian honorable humble humility.

“The others” are far more prevalent than the hypocrites. You just don’t see them because well, they are showing good Christian humility. They are allowing God’s honor to shine far over their own. They are humbly doing what they are doing because they have seen the Savior. A Savior named Jesus. They are allowing Jesus’ glory to shine through their humility. They know that in the end, it will be they who are exulted and lifted up. Lifted up by the very hand of Almighty God as He says, “Welcome home.”

Amen.