

# Sermon for The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Date:** August 28, 2022

**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 757 – Lord, It Belongs Not to My Care

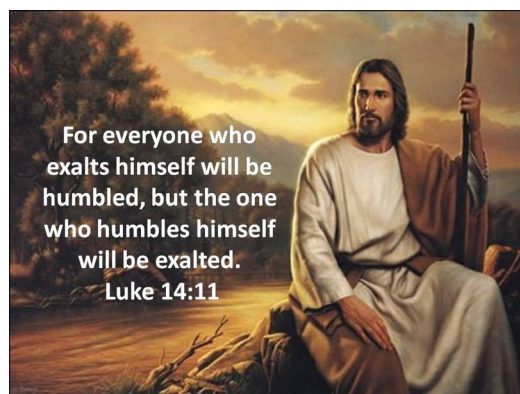
LSB 761 – Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

LSB 730 – What is This World to Me

LSB 791 – All People That on Earth Do Dwell

## Liturgy:

Divine Service: Sola Scriptura



## Songs:

Another in the Fire

Baptized - Zach William

Our God is an Awesome God (Mullins)

One Day – Cochren

## Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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## **Text: Luke 14:1–14**

One Sabbath, when [Jesus] went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, “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.

Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But 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. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 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. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

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Grace, peace, and God's eternal mercy be poured out upon the repentant and faithful this day, in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm sure most of you have gone seen a parade. People will 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 sit exactly where they want, where they have sat every year since they were a child.

There are other times when people want to "get there early." From time to time you will see in 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 ever heard of people camping out at the box office for week. Seven days of their lives spent waiting for a concert ticket.

There are other events 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 ministry I can tell you 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.

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, or those who want to put on an a show. They are not for regular every Sunday use.

So, you may wonder: Just why do Lutherans sit in the back of the church? The answer is: They have read what happened in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, our Gospel reading for today.

There Jesus had been invited for Sabbath Day dinner at the home of a Pharisee. The Bible fails to mention the reason for the special meal. It doesn't tell us if Jesus was the guest of honor. I am able to say the other people who were invited, especially the Pharisees, were keeping a close eye on Jesus.

Although Jesus was, is, and will always be the all-knowing Son of God. He 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 to get a good seat at the banquet table. Each of them wanted to make sure he wasn't being ignored or slighted. Each wanted to be certain he got every bit of honor he was

due. You see in those days the closer you sat to the front, or head of the table, the more important you were. The most important person always sat on the right side at the head of the table.

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 at the back by door, or behind a post. Pick a spot nobody else wants. That way, when the host of the wedding 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 where you belong." Jesus continued, "That's 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 up here? This spot is reserved for the important people. You go over there and get a seat behind the 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. That is why Lutherans sit in the back of the church. They don't want to call attention to themselves by parading up the aisle. They don't want to be like the Pharisees who went out of their way to tell everyone how important they were. Good Lutherans know, if you are that important people will know because you are that important. You won't need to tell them.

Jesus says we're supposed to be humble. That kind of thinking grates against our culture. Go to any library and you can find shelves filled with books that tell you how to be the best gardener, the best carpenter, the best public speaker, the best mechanic, the best hummingbird caller. If you go over to the music section of the library you might find a recording of that Country/Western song by Mac Davis. You know, the chorus that 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...

In the same library, however, if you ask them to take you to the "How To Be Humble" section, you'll leave the building without as much as a pamphlet. Jesus says we're supposed to be humble but that doesn't sound right to our sin affected ears. Jesus said we should be humble. That's a difficult concept to grasp.

1 Luke 14:11

Parents spend their days shuttling their children to soccer lessons, piano lessons, computer lessons and etiquette lessons. I haven't seen anyone lining up their little ones for humility lessons. Watch the winners of any high school, college, or professional sport and you will see a lot of jumping, shouting, and a lot of index fingers pointing to the sky as they chant, "We're number one! We're number one!"

Nobody is yelling, "We lost but winning isn't everything!" Almost everybody wants to be number one, to have a position of honor. Almost everybody wants to be: the best, the smartest, the richest, the handsomest, the most beautiful, the most popular. To be honest, that in and of itself is not inherently bad. We should strive to be the best. The problem is when striving to be the best replaces human decency or respect of others, or more importantly when it replaces God, when "the best" becomes your god.

Satan wanted to be number one and tried to overthrow God. When he failed at that he convinced Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit would make them number one, right up there with their Creator. Pick a sin, any sin at all, it doesn't make much difference: prejudice, a lust for authority, a lust for gossip, a lust for money, lies, greed, envy, all have their beginning in sinful hearts that say, "I want to be number one and I'm willing to do whatever is necessary to get and to hold on to that spot." It's can be a dangerous thing to do.

Now before I go farther you should know when Jesus says we should be humble, you shouldn't think He is encouraging people to be fake in their humility. God isn't pleased when His people slither around like the slimy villain Uriah Heep in Charles Dickens' book *David Copperfield*. You might remember that scoundrel who took great pride in boasting, "I'm the 'umblest man goin'." You shouldn't think when Jesus urges humility He's urging His followers to dumb down their abilities, and strive with all their might to be mediocre. God has given gifts to His people and He wants those gifts to be used wisely and well to help others.

What Jesus wants for us is, in honest humility, to acknowledge God as the giver of every good gift. He wants us to recognize 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 we do become the best at anything we need to humbly acknowledge He is the One who has given us that ability. James said it this way:

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

2 James 4:10

With those words God shows us a different “ladder of success.” We are humble because it’s right, not because of any reward we will get. We are humble because that’s what the Savior has asked us to be.

When God said, “Humble yourself so God can exalt you,” He wasn’t urging us to a life He wasn’t willing to live first. Now I, or any preacher for that matter, cannot accurately tell you what Heaven looks like, but I sure it’s a better than a Bethlehem stable. I cannot say I’ve seen the gilded streets of Paradise, but I am certain Heaven’s highways are better than the dusty, rocky, roads of Israel where Jesus walked. I can’t comprehend the dishes which sit on the banquet tables of Heaven, but I do know the fare there is more tasty than anything served at the Pharisee’s home the day Jesus arrived for dinner.

Look in God’s Word and you will see the Son of God living in humility. Hundreds of years before the events of the Gospels occurred the Prophet Isaiah spoke of Jesus’ life. The words of Isaiah 53 are filled with words describing the pain the Christ would humbly endure. Before He came to earth Jesus knew what would be expected of Him. Isaiah wrote:

*[Jesus]* had no form or majesty that would make us look at Him. He had nothing in his appearance that would make us desire Him. He was despised and rejected by people. He was a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering.

He was despised like one from whom people turn their faces, and we didn’t consider Him to be worth anything. He certainly has taken upon Himself our suffering and carried our sorrows, but we thought that God had wounded Him, beat Him, and punished Him.

He was wounded for our rebellious acts. He was crushed for our sins. He was punished so that we could have peace, and we received healing from His wounds.

He was abused and punished, but He didn’t open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. He was like a sheep that is silent when its wool is cut off. He did not open His mouth.<sup>3</sup>

3 Excerpts from Isaiah 53

That was Isaiah's, Holy Spirit inspired, forecast concerning the humble life Jesus would lead. After Jesus ascended back to Heaven Saint Paul explained what Jesus had done. To the church in Philippi:

[Jesus] emptied Himself by taking on the form of a servant, by becoming like regular people, 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>4</sup>

To the church in Galatia, he also gave some insight as to why Jesus had humbled Himself.

When the right time came, God sent His Son into the world. A woman gave birth to Him, and He came under the control of God's Law. God sent Him to pay for the freedom of those who were controlled by this Law so that we would be adopted as His children. So you are no longer slaves but God's children. Since you are God's children, God has also made you heirs.<sup>5</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 Jesus has done this, because Jesus has humbly kept the Law; because Jesus declined to accept Satan's suggestions to set aside the suffering;<sup>6</sup> because Jesus was willing to die the death our pride and arrogance has earned, because of this I am able to tell you, anyone who believes in Him as their successful perfect substitute is saved.

Now I should not fail to mention there are a lot of people in churches 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 humble followers? I suppose we have all known people like that at one time or another.

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

4 Philippians 2:7-11

5 Galatians 4:4-5,7

6 Matthew 5:8-9

didn't get it she was furious. When the pastor was told 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."

It's sad that we've all met such people in church. They are there. You can find them. Too often there on public display for all to see. But as a pastor working and seeing what goes on behind the scenes, 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 morning. I've seen people volunteering, stepping up to do any number of humble tasks. I've seen a widow picking up broken glass from a playground so the children won't fall and get hurt. 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, even if it risks the championship. I've seen "the others." For those of you who haven't seen these "others" these humble Christians... well, you wouldn't. Would you? These people don't show off and brag about all they are doing.

There are still many things that happen every week to make this church service happen that you never see. That might sound strange but it's true. A group of people humbly, and without notice, prepares and sets up all the things necessary for displaying the proper colors for the church year, and the accouterments for the Lord's Supper. "The others" are far more prevalent than the hypocrites. You just don't see them because, well they are expressing 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 stepping out of the way, allowing Jesus' glory to shine through their humility. They know, in the end, it will be they "the humble" who are exulted and lifted up. Lifted by the very hand of Almighty God as He says, "Welcome home good and faithful servant."<sup>7</sup>

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,  
Encourage one another in faith,  
Witness to God's love and  
Serve all people**



7 Matthew 25:21