

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: St. Luke 14:1-11

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” With this question, our LORD JESUS put the lawyers and Pharisees to the test; a test and a question which they failed to pass or answer even though the answer would seem to have been quite self-evident. However, the lawyers and Pharisees held their tongues and remained silent. In effect, they refused to answer JESUS.

These experts in the Law knew full well that mercy on the Sabbath *never* violates the Law of God. Yet, due to their sinful pride and arrogance, this was something they were unable to admit. Being prideful hypocrites, they were incapable of admitting that Jesus’ actions and words were God-pleasing and true. They would not submit to JESUS and so they would not submit to God. Not submitting themselves to God meant that for them there was no forgiveness.

Instead, the desire of the lawyers and Pharisees was *“to go around in long robes,”* to receive *“greetings in the marketplaces,”* to take *“the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts.”* They wanted to be recognized for their self-imagined self-importance. They would have rather *“shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men”* than to grant mercy—even, and perhaps most especially, on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were so pumped up by their arrogance, their self-esteem, and self-righteousness, that it seems they would have rather gone to hell than be humbled before CHRIST.

So it has been throughout human history. Consider our first parents, Adam and Eve. They had all that paradise had to offer: three square meals a day and comfortable weather day and night. They knew no disease, neither aging nor death. All creation existed for their enjoyment. All the world’s creatures were their friends, not their supper. They even walked with God Himself in the cool of the day. God declared that all they had was not only good but indeed, very good. Yes, they had everything, but, as it turned out, for Adam and Eve, everything was not quite good enough. They did not just want to walk with God; they wanted to be gods.

That, my friends, is what sinful pride will do. You see, pride is never satisfied. It is never really happy. It is always looking closely to measure itself against all others. That is what the Pharisees did at this meal; they watched JESUS closely to see what He might do, what Law He might transgress so they would finally have charges against Him that they might then kill Him. All due to their sinful pride.

Because of their sinful pride, they hated JESUS. They hated Him because they knew the words He spoke and the things He taught were meet, right and salutary, and they themselves were false and wrong. They hated JESUS because He had the audacity to tell them they were no

better than those whom *they* judged to be sinners and therefore, unworthy of the love and forgiveness of God. Yes, they hated JESUS, so much so, that they remained speechless, unable to receive correction, unable to repent, or even acknowledge their sin, even after He healed a suffering fellow human being before them.

In refusing to answer JESUS, the silence of the Pharisees spoke volumes. Their refusal to answer was a sign of their silent disapproval and rejection of JESUS, rejection of His message, and rejection of His Kingdom—and perhaps most damning, their inability to repent, and so they rejected the forgiveness JESUS had come to offer them.

It is easy to look back at the Pharisees and wag our fingers, click our tongue, and wonder at their arrogance and their ignorance. It is just as easy to wonder at Adam and Eve, perhaps even more so. However, such wonder is nothing less than the same sinful pride that consumed them.

Tell me, why should you think that you are any better than were they? What is it about your humility that makes you any more acceptable to God than were they? How does *your* humility merit forgiveness and eternal life? How is it that you are so humble?

Be careful when you answer and try not to break your arm as you pat yourself on the back. Oh, and one more thing I must point out and you would do well to consider; as soon as you think you are humble, you have fallen into the sin of pride. You see, nothing is more hypocritical than wearing a mask of humility. Think about it. No one who believes himself to be humble is *truly* humble. *“Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”* The moment one congratulates him or herself for their humility they have fallen into the sin of pride!

So, it is, that your pride seeks the best seat at the banquet, looking to grab it before someone less deserving than you is seated there first. Your pride looks to puff yourself up in front of strangers as well as your friends and relatives. Pride lives for glory and craves recognition. Pride will seek an advantage, even when there is no advantage to be had. Pride seeks power to lord over others.

Your pride sulks over imagined hurts and slights and refuses to be reconciled until it is stroked. Pride struts around like a tom turkey or a bull elk in mating season. Pride seeks the praises of men instead of the praises of our Father in heaven. But remember, *“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud.”*

Therefore, do not be like the Pharisees; instead repent! Repent and give thanks to God that it is indeed lawful to be healed on the Sabbath, for that is, in truth, what has been done for you this very day. Repent, for though humility and meekness are not what you seek, though instead, you desire the place of honor, JESUS, your Savior, suffered the humiliation of the Cross that you may be exalted.

JESUS is the One *“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross.”* JESUS died the death of the Cross to heal you of your sinful pride and hypocrisy. JESUS left the glory of Heaven and descended into the pit of hell to rescue you from Satan, sin, and the grave.

He, who is God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, humbled Himself to be born of a lowly virgin, that you may be raised up from your lowly estate. He, who is truly humble and lowly, gave you all that He had without ever counting the cost. You are exalted because JESUS was lifted up that all that look on Him should not die but have eternal life. Thus, the seat of honor which sits at God’s right hand awaits you. There is no higher place!

Our LORD declares to you, *“I have died for you and I am risen again. I invite you to My Table—to My Wedding Feast of eternal life. Do not worry about your seat at the Table, for this is a heavenly banquet; your position at this Table is not determined by your status or your standing, nor is it determined by your works, nor your deeds, nor your merit, but by what has been accomplished in Me for you. I sit at the right hand of My FATHER, and I bring you as a guest to My Table. You are to be seated with Me.”*

So, come now and take your seat at the LORD’s table. You are His beloved Bride, His only-begotten. You, He has raised up to an exalted place. It is you He wishes to honor. JESUS has invited you, the poor, the maimed, and the blind, the arrogant and the proud. In His Supper, He offers you forgiveness, life, and salvation. With His Body and Blood, JESUS offers the cure for every sin that ails you. He Himself has prepared His Table for you, and He Himself will serve you. He is the Host, the Servant, and the Feast. You are not worthy and you cannot repay His hospitality, but there has been no mistake. You are to be His honored guest.

Come now, for you have received our LORD JESUS’ invitation. Come and hear Him say, *“Friend, go up higher.”* You have been humbled, and with a contrite heart, you have confessed your sins and JESUS has exalted you with His blessed words of absolution, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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