

# THE SIN OF PRIDE

Luke 14:1-14

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

September 1, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 14, verses 1 through 14. It is on page 739 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus exposes the sin of pride and emerges as our humble Savior. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 14, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. <sup>3</sup> And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?**” <sup>4</sup> But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. <sup>5</sup> 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?**” <sup>6</sup> And they could not reply to these things.

<sup>7</sup> Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, <sup>8</sup> “**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, <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”**

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

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

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We need to get over ourselves.

Now who do I mean? Who's “we”? Those of us here at Trinity? Christians in general? Human beings? Yes. All of us. We all need to get over ourselves. But since everyone else in the world isn't here right now, we should probably just focus on ourselves.

C.S. Lewis called pride the great sin. And he wasn't the first Christian to say this. Lewis praises Christian morality because, since the very beginning, Christian moral teaching has recognized pride as the chief sin. So Lewis didn't say anything new about pride, but I mention him, because his book *Mere Christianity* is the first place this stood out to me. He deals with the sin of pride there in eight easy pages. If you read it, which I highly recommend, he might make

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you laugh out loud a few times, but he will also cause you to realize just how prideful you really are. That, at least, was my experience.

Lewis says this concerning pride: “There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.” (121).

Think about this with me. Is there a person you don’t like? They could be classmates, coworkers, siblings, or fellow church members. I’m talking about the people who really get under our skin. You just don’t like their personality. The reason we don’t like them is usually pride. Think about it. Am I right? Is pride the problem? I bet it is. But here’s the thing: it’s not really their pride that makes you dislike them; it’s your own. *The more pride we have in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.* We can’t stand it when someone thinks they’re better than us. Why? Because we want to be better than them. So the next time you catch yourself thinking, “Oh, that person is so prideful,” take it as an indictment against yourself.

Here’s the thing about pride: pride is by nature competitive. It cares about having more and being better. Pride doesn’t really care how much money I have. It cares about having *more* money than someone else. And pride doesn’t really care how smart I am, or how good looking I am, or how righteous I am. Pride cares about being *smarter, better* looking, or *more* righteous than other people. Pride is all about the competition. Everyone in the world could be a genius; we could all have an I.Q. of 160, but pride would not be satisfied. But if you had an I.Q. of 80 while everyone else in the world had an I.Q. 75, pride would be satisfied. Pride is all about the competition. This is why pride hates pride. Does someone else think they’re better than you? Ooh, that really gets to you doesn’t it. Why? Because you want to be better than them.

Now pride is not necessarily the belief that we *are* better than other people. Pride is simply the *desire* to be better. Pride is all about elevating ourselves, seeking our own best interests, and satisfying our own desires. Pride is when we value ourselves over other people. Pride really makes ourselves to be our own gods, and that is why pride is the chief sin. It is the ultimate breaking of the First Commandment. C.S. Lewis observed, “It was through Pride that the devil became the devil” (122).

And we can say the same thing about the fall into sin. Do you remember what the devil tempted Adam and Eve with? He said, “You will become like God” (Gen. 3:5). That’s what they wanted. They wanted to be God. They were breaking the First Commandment in the most prideful way possible. So pride is not always the belief that we *are* better. Sometimes it is simply the *desire* to be better.

You might actually be better at something. You might be the fastest kid in your class. And this is just a fact. Whenever you race, you win. You’re the fastest, and everybody knows it. You can know this too. That is not pride. You don’t have to pretend you’re the slowest. Pride is when you glory in being the fastest.

So pride is not the same thing as high self-esteem. They can be related, but they are not the same thing. You can have really low self-esteem, but also be very prideful. In fact, pride can sometimes be the cause of low self-esteem. If you have a really strong desire to be better than everyone else, but you keep failing at it, that will lead to low self-esteem.

And there is also a proper Christian self-esteem that is really high, but is not prideful at all. When we think of ourselves rightly, we find our value not in our actions, but in God’s actions. And when we find our value in God’s actions, we realize that value is really, really high. First, we remember that God created us. We are valuable because we are human beings, created in the image of God. That’s really high value. Second, we find our value in the fact that God has

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redeemed us through the blood of Jesus Christ. That's an even higher value. These two actions of God define Christian self-esteem. You are a human being and a child of God. Now, you might not find that to be very reassuring, because God created everyone, and Jesus died for everyone. So this doesn't really distinguish you from anyone else in the world. But that's the point. Your value is no more and no less than anyone else. The desire to distinguish ourselves as something better is pride. Pride is when we value ourselves more than another person. Pride is when we seek our own good ahead of someone else's.

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Pride is an especially dangerous sin, because there's this insidious aspect of it where it often goes unrepented of and, therefore, unforgiven. If you confront a prideful person of being too prideful, they might just be too prideful to admit it. And in this way pride makes us resist the work of the Holy Spirit when he comes to convict us of sin. So the sin of pride, more than any other sin, often goes unrepented of and, therefore, unforgiven.

You might even be so prideful that you refuse to admit you are prideful and actually think you are very humble. If anyone thinks himself humble, that is a pretty good sign that he is really extremely prideful.

And the sin of pride has this same impact on our other sins too. Our pride is what makes us so unwilling to repent of our sins, and it leads us to justify ourselves, rather than letting God be the one who justifies us. Pride makes us refuse to admit that our many other sins are actually sins.

So we are constantly in danger of letting our confession of sin become merely theoretical. We ascent to the belief "that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against [God] in thought, word, and deed." We ascent to that in a theoretical way. But if someone came to us and confronted us with all the sins of thought, word, and deed, just from the last day, we would pull out all our tricks to justify ourselves. *Oh, I just did that because ...* And we have a million excuses we can put in that blank. Or, *You should have heard what she said to me first; then you would understand.* We have so many ways of justifying ourselves. And the reason we do it is pride. Our pride prevents us from admitting our sins and repenting of them.

And so a prideful soul may be living in complete unrepentance, all the while thinking he is okay with God. Now, if you are concerned that this might be you—if you are concerned that you may be so prideful that you don't realize you are prideful—then you are probably not too far gone. If, however, you are not concerned about it, that may be a sign that you are unrepentant and on the path to hell. If you think you are prideful, you are right, and you need to repent. If you do not think you are prideful, you are wrong, and you need to repent. Every human being is prideful. Those who know it are in danger, and those who don't know it are in more danger.

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The text today comes to us in three parts. And, at first glance, the three parts seem unrelated, except for this: they all deal with pride.

In the first part, some Pharisees and lawyers are watching Jesus to see if he will heal someone on the Sabbath. Then they can accuse him of breaking the Sabbath by working when he should be resting.

But they completely misunderstand the Law; there is nothing wrong with healing on the Sabbath. And we could go into those details, but it also works to just say that it is always okay to do a good deed.

The reason for their hostility toward Jesus was simply a whole lot of pride and jealousy. If Jesus heals the guy, then they can judge him and feel superior to him. They were proud of the

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fact that they never healed anyone on the Sabbath. Never mind that they probably couldn't heal people other days of the week either. So there's a strong element of spiritual pride in them. We usually call this "self-righteousness." They valued their own personal righteousness over anything or anyone else. So they felt threatened when Jesus came along and was obviously far more righteous than they were. They had to find some way to put themselves back on top, even if it was only in their own minds. The worst part of this self-righteousness was that it prevented them from seeing Jesus as their Savior. They were jealous of his righteousness, and, ironically, this actually prevented them from receiving it as a gift. Jesus gives his righteousness to all who trust in him, but those who seek their own righteousness cut themselves off from the gift of Jesus' righteousness. The real problem here is pride.

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So in the second part of the text, Jesus addresses their pride. He cloaks it as advice about what to do and what not to do when they are invited to a wedding.

He advises them to not claim for themselves the place of honor at a wedding feast. When you think about it, this is really quite obvious. It's so inappropriate that it's funny. Imagine someone who goes to a wedding, and as soon as the ceremony is over, they race out of the sanctuary to get the place of honor. Then the host has to come over and say, "Uh, sir, that's where the bride sits." Or even if he doesn't shoot quite that high, imagine taking the best man's seat, or the father of the bride, or her great-grandmother. This would be incredibly embarrassing. You're up in front of everyone, you get kicked out of that seat, and the only thing left is a seat in the very back with the usher's fourth cousins.

Jesus' advice is this: If you really think you're someone special, let the host make that determination. Start out with the usher's fourth cousins, and if the host thinks you are more important than that, let him exalt you. Jesus says, **"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"** (14:11).

Now, the funny thing is, we can hear that advice in a very prideful and selfish way. In fact, we probably do. We think, *Oh, now I get it. All I have to do is act humble, and other people will praise me for it.* This is obviously not true humility. And it just goes to show how selfish we really are. We take a statement about humility, and we try to use it to glorify ourselves. It's absurd. Sometimes we can get it to work, but often times other people see right through it. And even if nobody else sees what we're really doing, God sees our true motives.

What we think of as humility, is usually just self-deprecation. We run ourselves down, hoping that someone will feel obligated to lift us up. That's not humility. Humility doesn't really pay attention to oneself. It pays attention to other people. So when you meet someone who is truly humble, it's not going to be a self-loathing person who just says all sorts of bad things about himself. Instead, he'll probably be a fairly cheerful and friendly person who takes a great interest in you. That's what humility looks like. It looks like a genuine concern for other people. Humility chooses the lower place, in order to lift others up.

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And we see this in the third part of the text. Jesus tells the host of the dinner not to invite his friends and relatives and rich neighbors over for dinner. He tells him to invite **"the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind"** (14:13). The point is that your economic equals and superiors can repay you. And sometimes this is really what we're looking for. We try to make friends with rich and influential people in the hopes that they will feel obligated to pay us back. Jesus says not to do that. I don't think he means that we are forbidden from having our friends and relatives over for dinner. Do not say to your mother, "I know it's your birthday, but Jesus says I can't have

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you over for dinner.” That’s not the point. The point is that true hospitality does not expect repayment. True hospitality looks for the person who will most benefit from our kindness. And this is also humility. Pride uses others to lift ourselves up. Humility looks to the needs of others in order to lift them up.

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And this, of course, is what Jesus has done for us. This is really the most important aspect of this text. I hope we all recognize how sneaky and depraved the sin of pride is, and I hope we get a little better picture of what humility is, but if that’s all we get, then we’re still lost in our sinful pride, and we don’t actually have the gospel, which can work humility in our hearts.

More than anything, this text reveals the ministry of Jesus, and how he humbled himself for our sake.

In the first part, Jesus heals a sick man. He does not care what others think of him. In fact, he knows the Pharisees and lawyers will think evil of him for healing the sick man, but he does it anyway. And nowhere do people think less of Jesus than when he is on the cross. He knows they will mock him and spit on him, but he goes there anyway.

And when we consider the cross, we see that the parable of the wedding feast is really a picture of Jesus. He chose for himself the lowest place. He assumed the place of a criminal. It was such a low place that no one in the world realized it was really a wedding. But this is how Jesus purified his bride, the Church, and joined her to himself. He went as low as the grave. And it was from this low place that his Father said, **“Move up higher”** (14:10). Though he has been the Son of God for all eternity, he humbled himself to the lowest place for our sake. And because of this humility, he is now exalted to the highest place.

And now that he is exalted, who does he invite to the feast of the ages? And by that I mean the heavenly banquet. Who does Jesus invite? Does he invite his equals? The Father and the Holy Spirit are already there. Does he invite his superiors? There are none. He invites those who are not worthy. He invites those who cannot pay him back. He invites you and me, those who are so filled with pride, and for no good reason. He invites **“the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.”** He calls us to despair of our own righteousness, because we don’t actually have any, and to receive and rejoice in his.

In all three parts of this text we see our sinful pride exposed. Jesus preaches the Law to us, that we should not be so prideful, but should consider others more important than ourselves. That is the Law. And the Gospel is that Jesus practices what he preaches. He humbled himself. He placed our needs ahead of our own. He endured the cross for our sake, so that he might heal us of our unrighteousness. He humbled himself to the lowest place. And now that he is exalted to the highest place, he calls us to where he is, that we might feast forever with him in his heavenly kingdom. Forsake your pride, and glory in Jesus Christ, who has humbled himself for you. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.