The Lord Lifts Up the Lowly
Luke 14:1, 7-14

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word of God through which the Holy Spirit brings us the words of our Savior is Luke 14

And it happened that, when Jesus came to the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, they were carefully watching him. He began to speak a parable to those who had been invited, since he took notice of how they kept choosing the most important places. He said to them, “When you’re invited to a wedding by someone, don’t put yourselves at the most important places. Perhaps a guest more distinguished than you was invited by him, and he who invited you and him will come and say to you, ‘Give him this spot.’ Then ashamed you’ll have to go take the lowest spot. Rather, when invited, go and drop yourself at the lowest spot, so that when the one who invited you comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, come on up to a higher place.’ Then you will have praise in front of all the guests with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

He began to speak also to the host, who had invited him, “When you make lunch or supper, don’t keep inviting your friends, your brothers, your relatives, or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in turn and you have your reward. Rather, when you have a dinner, call the poor, the cripple, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed because they do not have anything to reward you with, for you will be rewarded in the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:1, 7-14).

This is the word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant ... He has shown the strength of his arm; he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:46, 47, 51, 52 translation from Christian Worship, p. 57, 58, “Evening Prayer”)

Those were words of a poor, young lady. Do you recognize them? They are the words of Mary who marveled at how the Lord would choose a lowly sinner like her to be the mother of God. The Lord lifts up the lowly.

Or consider that boy, the youngest of eight brothers. When an honored guest came to town and requested that the family dine with him, he was left behind doing the family chores. But the prophet Samuel refused to start without him, for the Lord would take young David from watching the family sheep to shepherding the people of Israel as their
And as we listen to Jesus' parables today, keep that theme in mind. For Jesus is not teaching us about table manners or how to get ahead in this world. He is teaching us how to conduct our lives, knowing that the Lord lifts up the lowly. So dear Christian friends, humbly trust the Lord to do so (part 1) and selflessly serve others (part 2). For you know and believe that the Lord lifts up the lowly.

A. Humbly trust him to do so

On the surface Jesus’ words can make sense even to the unbelieving world. A man or woman of this world could figure: “If I appear to be too proud or self-promoting, like that first guest in the parable, someone might put me in my place. Acting humble so that someone else promotes me sounds safe and could just work.” The world gets that kind of logic.

But Jesus goes so much deeper. He makes it clear that he’s not talking about social engagements or worldly promotion as he applies this parable to all with the words, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11 NIV84). And those words also make it clear that he isn’t talking about some sort of sham humility. He’s not endorsing the person who covets a higher position and so pretends to be humble. Jesus says, “he who humbles himself” — truly humbles himself in his heart and not just in his actions.

And that’s the rub, dear friends. We could all manage to act humble, but where does the humble heart come from? The humble heart doesn’t merely accept or put up with a low position but is satisfied, content, even happy in taking that lowest of spots. It doesn’t imagine life would be better if we had a higher place. It doesn’t feel slighted or mistreated. It doesn’t think, “Well, I deserve better.” or “I’m worth more, but I’ll put up with this.” Those thoughts exalt ourselves, even if outwardly we’re acting humble.

Maybe someone would argue, “But, Pastor, the kind of humility you’re talking about would lead to low self-esteem, despondency, despair, even hopelessness.” Yes, that is the kind of humility I’m talking about and it would end in hopelessness, except for Jesus’ words of promise. He says, “he who humbles himself” — and now here’s the promise — “will be exalted.” Notice Jesus does not say, “Will exalt themselves.” or “Will lift themselves up.” He uses the passive. Someone else will do it for them. Someone else will exalt them, just as in Jesus’ parable the host is the one who tells the person in the low spot, “Friend, move up to a better place” (Luke 14:10 NIV84). And you know who does the exalting for us. The Lord lifts up the lowly. So humbly trust him to do so.

Trust him no matter how long he may take. Trust him even if it never happens in this life. Trust him to lift up the lowly. For no matter how much the world despises God’s people and pushes us down, we will stand with Jesus in glory when he comes again. The Lord lifts up the lowly. Humbly trust him to do so.

This humble trust relies on the Holy Spirit, who alone can work true humility within us. How does the Spirit do that? He does that as we take to heart God’s law, summarized in the Ten Commandments. An honest look into that mirror shows that he having nothing to boast about. Just the opposite! We daily fail to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We use his name carelessly and then forget to call on him.
continually. Do we always gladly hear and learn his word? Do we show the proper honor and respect to those in authority even when they don’t do their job as well as we expect? Has unrighteous anger, lust, or greed entered our hearts? Do we always defend the good name of our neighbor and take their words and actions in the kindest possible way? Are we filled with godly contentment or do we covet? How the commandments put us in our place, the lowest place!

But the Spirit reveals through the Scriptures what the Lord God has done for us. It’s summarized in the Creed. The Father created you and takes care of you. He does it all because he is the good and merciful Father in heaven and not because we have earned or deserved it. His mercy lifts us up. The Son was born to die for us and then rise to reign over all for us. While we were lost and condemned creatures, he purchased us with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. His grace lifts us up. The Spirit has called you to faith in Jesus, enlightening you with his gifts and uniting you to the holy Christian church. Your sins are forgiven. You will rise from the dead and live eternally. Even though by our own thinking or choosing we could not believe in Jesus Christ or come to him, the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel. His good news of peace lifts us up.

Humble trust keeps on going back to the Commandments and the Creed so that the Lord can keep on lifting us up. And as we humbly trust him to lift us up, the Holy Spirit empowers us to selflessly serve others.

B. Selflessly serve others

In the second part of the text, Jesus addresses the host. He’s not simply giving guidance in how to put together a guest list. He’s aiming at the heart. He’s not saying it’s wrong to invite friends or family. But what is your motive? What is in your heart?

Those are questions to ask ourselves when it comes to any act of kindness or any kind of good deed. Why am I serving others? What’s in my heart? Am I doing it so that they will return the favor some day? Am I doing it to get thanked? Am I doing it so that I look good and others will know that I’m a nice person? Am I doing it so that they will pass it on, pay it forward, and so my good deed is multiplied? Am I doing it so that I can feel good about myself? All those thoughts are focused on some sort of return, some sort of reward, something to benefit myself now.

But where truly selflessly serving come from? Only the Holy Spirit can work in us that genuine selflessness. How does he do that? Through the Scriptures and the Sacraments he strengthens our faith to more and more rely on God and his promises rather than on self:

For example, through the Lord’s Supper today, the Holy Spirit comes in a supernatural way and testifies to you: “Here is your righteousness, dear sinner. For this bread is the body of Jesus that he sacrificed on the cross in your place. Take and eat. This wine is the blood of Jesus shed to pay for all of your sins. Take and drink. Believe that Jesus, and Jesus alone is your righteousness. He gives you, dear Christian, a right standing before your God.” That’s the testimony of the Holy Spirit to you, dear sinners. Through the Scriptures he speaks that same testimony.

And only by believing that Jesus alone is our full and complete righteousness, only
such faith can turn its back on all self-interest. Jesus has done it all for you, so serve others selflessly. What blessing as we hold on to Jesus’ righteousness alone and anticipate that day that he will return and raise us from the dead to live with him! Then all will see that his righteousness counts for us. The last verse of the text takes our thoughts in that direction, as Jesus says, “... and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14 NIV84).

How this humbles us as well! For we know and confess that even the best and kindest service we do is still corrupted by our selfishness. Our new, spiritual self and our old, sinful self are in constant conflict. But the Lord lifts up the lowly. He lifts you up, dear Christian. Despite the old self corrupting what we do, Jesus’ blood washes it clean and his righteousness covers the stains. So your life, though imperfect, becomes a pleasing thank offering to God. As you serve others, you are serving your Lord.

So do what is good and kind and helpful. Selflessly serve others. Do it for the Father as his love shines through you to them. Do it for your Savior whose righteousness counts for you and purifies your service. Do it for the Holy Spirit who brings you God’s blessings day after day and works in you the desire and power to serve. Do it all for the glory of God, who lifts up the lowly.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.