

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday  
St. Luke 14:1-11  
October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

### They Watched Him Closely

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

#### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

Lord God, heavenly Father: We beseech Thee so to guide and direct us by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not exalt ourselves, but humbly fear Thee, with our whole hearts hear and keep Thy Word, and hallow the Lord's Day, that we also may be hallowed by Thy Word; help us, first, to place our hope and confidence in Thy Son, + Jesus Christ, Who alone is our righteousness and Redeemer, and, then, so to amend and better our lives in accordance with Thy Word, that we may avoid all offenses and finally obtain eternal salvation, through Thy grace in Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God. world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Evangelist St. Luke in the Gospel reading for today gives us two seemingly unrelated events: Our Lord + Jesus heals a man with dropsy and tells them a parable about choosing seats at a wedding feast. These two events could be taken separately as a preacher; preaching on the first part one year and the next part a different year. However, these two events that are recorded in the Gospel of the Evangelist St. Luke are not unrelated. They both deal with a specific sin. Both of these events instruct us on humility. It reveals the hubris—the haughtiness and pride—of the Pharisees and lawyers. It also serves to point out how we are also, as we prayed in the Collect of the Day, tempted by the devil into pride and self-righteousness.

We are told by St. Luke that our Lord + Jesus was invited to eat bread in the home of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on a Sabbath. The Jews regarded the Sabbath as a day of feasting. So it was not uncommon for them to gather in the homes of each other and sit down and eat together as the family of the Triune Lord God, much like we gather here every Sunday do kneel down together at this altar and eat and drink our Lord Jesus Christ's Body and Blood given in bread and wine as a family of the Triune Lord God. When we come together, we do it to share in the fellowship and bond that we have as redeemed children of the heavenly Father. We come together as one fellowship to receive from our Lord + Jesus forgiveness, life and salvation.

It is a mini remembrance of our Lord's resurrection from the dead on the Feast of His resurrection—a mini Easter. The Jews would come together on a Sabbath as a mini remembrance of the Passover; the day the Lord God delivered His people from the bonds of slavery to the Egyptians. Both the Jews of our Lord's time and us Christians today celebrate our deliverance from the bondage of slavery. The Jews celebrated their freedom from slavery to the Egyptians, and we celebrate our freedom from the bondage of slavery to sin, death and the devil. We celebrate on the Lord's Day—on Sunday. The Jews celebrated on the Day of our Lord's rest after creating the world—on the Sabbath.

Therefore, it was not uncommon for the Jews to gather on a Sabbath. It was not breaking any

Sabbath laws regarding work. The food would have been prepared before the Sabbath, and the distance that people would have to go if they were invited would break any Sabbath customs, either. What is odd, however, is that our Lord + Jesus is invited by one of the rulers of the Pharisees. Our Lord + Jesus was well into His ministry by this time. The scribes, lawyers, and Pharisees were already wishing to be done with our Lord. The time of His death on the cross was fast approaching. The Evangelist St. Luke tells us that the ones who invited our Lord + Jesus “watched Him closely.”

They wanted to see His behavior on a Sabbath; this most holy of days to the Jews. There suddenly appears in our pericope a man with dropsy. Many pages of scriptural commentaries have been written asking the question whether this man was a plant by the Pharisees, or if he just happened to show up because he knew the Lord + Jesus was going to be there. The Evangelist St. Luke does not tell us either way, so any opinion regarding this can only be conjecture. The fact remains, however, that this man with dropsy is there before the Lord in the presence of everyone. Everyone can be witness to this man’s presence and subsequent healing.

What makes this even more interesting is the disease of dropsy itself. Dropsy, referred to in modern times as “edema” is a condition where the cells of the body fill with water. The Greek word is “hydropikos.” It literally means “swollen with water.” And even though your cells were swollen with water, your thirst could never be quenched. A person would drown in their own flesh, and still feel like they were parched in a desert. What is also interesting about the disease is that in our Lord’s day, and even into the centuries of the Early Church, as can be seen by the writings of some of the Church Fathers, is that it was believed that this disease was caused by “excessive living.” In other words, a person would develop dropsy—become swollen with water—because they lived a life of enjoying food and beverage to excess. Something for which many of us in our society are known.

It would be clear to everyone that this man lived a life of sin. Not only is this man here in the presence of our Lord + Jesus to be healed on a Sabbath, but he is also clearly a man who lived a sinful life. For the Pharisees this man would not be worthy of healing. He got what he deserved on account of the way of life that he led. Not much is told us about this man, or our Lord’s healing of Him. Our Lord heals him and sends him away just as quickly as he appears in the narrative. The point that the Evangelist St. Luke wants to direct our attention to is our Lord’s question to the Pharisees. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

Here we have a ruler of the Pharisees, and we can assume many other Pharisees and lawyers. These are men who studied the law of the Lord God meticulously. If there was an answer to our Lord’s question, they would know. But there is only silence from them. Then our Lord + Jesus reveals their hypocrisy and self-righteousness. None of them would be so cruel and harsh as to leave their ox or donkey in a pit into which they had fallen on a Sabbath. It is basic human decency. We are not supposed to be cruel to living things. They would not think they were breaking the Sabbath rules if they helped out an animal on the Sabbath—because helping an ox or donkey out of a pit would require much work; more work than would have been allowed on the Sabbath. How much more compassionate is it to help one’s fellowman on a Sabbath. In response to our Lord’s question, they are not only silent, but they are rendered free of an answer entirely. “They could not answer Him regarding these things.”

What this reveals about them is their pride and self-righteousness. They would not deem it unnecessary to break the Sabbath to help an ox or donkey, but this man with dropsy—this person who bears the disease caused by his excessively sinful life—is not worthy of their time or compassion. In healing this man with dropsy our Lord + Jesus shows that it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. It is not only lawful, it is required. It is required of us in the Second Table of the Law to help and befriend our neighbor in every bodily and earthly need. This mercy for our neighbor does not stop because it is the Sabbath—we do not stop being merciful on the Lord’s Day. In fact, we should show even more mercy by inviting our neighbors to come and worship with us in this house, so that they too can hear that they

are forgiven of their sins for the sake of the Lord + Jesus Christ and His works and merits. What could be more merciful than that? How could we not heal our neighbor of his greatest disease? How could we not show love and mercy for our neighbor by rescuing him from the pit of sin and shame into which he has fallen.

If we are unwilling to do this with our neighbors, the people we see every day of our life, we are really no different from the Pharisees in the Gospel reading. Therefore, our Lord + Jesus has even more to say to us today. He tells us a parable of choosing seats at a wedding feast. The Evangelist St. Luke begins this pericope by telling us that the Pharisees “watched Him closely.” The second half of today’s Gospel reading is connected to the first part when we are told that our Lord + Jesus “noted how they chose the best places.” The Pharisees were watching our Lord + Jesus, but He is noting their behavior as well. The Pharisees watched Him in order to find something to which they could accuse Him. Our Lord + Jesus watches them in order that He might show them the error of their ways and rescue them from that error.

The Pharisees in their pride and self-righteousness had exalted themselves over their fellowman—the man with dropsy. This man had lived a life of excess that led him to be laid low with disease. He was forced into humility by the disease that afflicted him. Even after seeing this man with dropsy—after witnessing their fellowman brought low—they still clamored for the best seats. Their pride was still on display for our Lord + Jesus to witness. They were oblivious to their sinfulness, and were oblivious to sin even after seeing the affects of it in the man with dropsy.

How much like them are we at times? How often does our own sin *not* drive us into contrition, but rather self-righteousness as we justify our actions by comparing our misdeeds against the deeds of others. We deceive ourselves by saying that we are not as bad as those other people. Yes, we are! If we cannot be brought into contrition by our own behavior, then we should bring ourselves into contrition by the sinfulness of other people. They are no different than we are. We are all poor, miserable sinners in need of the Lord God’s grace and mercy.

When our Lord + Jesus admonishes the Pharisees to seek the lowest place at the wedding feast, He is not simply talking about good etiquette. He is admonishing us all to live a humble life; to daily admit that we are poor, miserable sinners in need of His grace and mercy; to daily acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves by our righteousness. Our Lord + Jesus is admonishing all who hear this Gospel today to recognize the One Who humbled Himself on the tree of the holy cross for us. He was lifted up on the tree of the holy cross—He was humbled to the point of death—in order that He might win for us forgiveness, life and salvation.

When we in all humility confess our pride and self-righteousness—our desire to justify ourselves by comparing our deeds to others—we take the lowest place of contrition and sorrow over our sins. When we confess our sins in sorrow and contrition, our Lord + Jesus says to us, “Friend, go up higher.” For through His minister He declares to us that our sins are forgiven for the sake of His works and merits. He has perfectly fulfilled the Law on our behalf, and He has suffered and died in our place on the tree of the holy cross, in order that He might heal us of the condition that we have on account of our excessive sinful living.

In our humility—with the sting of the disease of sin in our hearts and minds—we can gather together on this Sabbath Day of our Lord’s rest. He rested in the tomb to give us life on the day of His resurrection, which we commemorate today and every Sunday. We who are brought low by sin—who take the lowest place in contrition—gather together in perfect fellowship and we kneel before our Lord + Jesus and receive from Him His precious gifts of life and salvation. For He takes us, heals us, and sends us on our way by declaring to us through His ministers that we are forgiven of our iniquities for His sake. It is on account of His righteousness—His being exalted to the right hand of the Father—that

we have a place in Heaven. He invites us to this heavenly banquet to eat bread with Him. There in His home which He has prepared for us, we will enjoy the eternal Sabbath rest in His presence. In our eternal heavenly home, we will have glory in the presence of all the angel hosts, for our Lord + Jesus has humbled Himself to come down from Heaven, in order that He might lift us out of sin to live with Him for all eternity. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray Thee so to govern and guide us by Thy Holy Spirit that we may with all our heart hear and receive Thy Word, and truly sanctify the Lord's Day, to the end that we may, in turn, be sanctified by Thy Word, that we may rest all our confidence and hope on + Jesus Christ, Thy Son, amend our lives in accordance with Thy Word, and avoid every offense, until we shall, by Thy grace in Christ, be saved forever through the same, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*