

Grace Mercy and Peace are now yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Amen.

Our focus for our sermon today is going to be from our Gospel reading. For many weeks we have been slowly walking through the Gospel of Luke. We have seen Jesus send disciples on ahead of him with urgency to spread the good news of the coming kingdom of God. We have seen Jesus preach to crowds, teach the disciples and perform miracles privately and publicly. He is doing all of this while He is making His way up to Jerusalem. He is marching the kingdom of God towards the cross. In one sense we are seeing Jesus last days before His passion. Seeing His last actions, words and deeds before He is given over to the authorities.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He has been combative with one particular group. He has had run ins with a group called the Pharisees. In the previous chapter before our own today, Jesus argues with Pharisees and they inform Jesus that Herod seeks His life. Often in the church we use names and mention people or groups like it is common knowledge. So before we explore our Gospel reading it is important to ask the question– Who are these guys? Who are the pharisees?

A Pharisee is a member of a Jewish sect or in modern terms political party around the time of Jesus day. For the Pharisee righteousness is found in following and keeping the Law of God in all aspects of life. The life of a Pharisee is a life of complex decision making. Can what I am doing in any way break God's law? Is bringing a meal next door to my neighbor on the sabbath work? If priests have to wash their hands before eating is it something I should do? These questions lead to laws to protect the person from breaking the law. This impacted every aspect of their life and the New Testament tells us that these Pharisees had a self-righteousness about them because of their supposed righteousness.

So Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. He is on His way to complete His mission of Salvation for all people. On His way HE has come into contact with these righteous pharisees again and again. Usually these meetings are combative. They are trying to trick or undermine the teachings of Jesus. Yet today in our Gospel reading, Jesus does something almost normal for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Jesus is invited over for a dinner on the Sabbath. A unnamed ruler of the pharisees, the leader of these righteous law keepers invites Jesus to dine with him. This isn't your normal awkward first-time dinner party. Something more sinister is at hand. In our first verse a phrase sets the tone for this invite and the dinner party itself. Jesus is being watched carefully. Watched carefully to see what He will do. So as readers of this text today we too are invited to watch Jesus carefully. As we watch our Lord, the Gospel reading for today gives us three different short narratives about Jesus at this dinner party. Each one of them instead of trapping Jesus in His actions as the Pharisees often sought to do, reveals the hearts of those at the dinner party. It reveals their fascination with their own self righteousness and the lack of caring they have for their neighbor.

As Jesus dines with the Pharisees and as He surveys the room before Him. Jesus sees someone who is suffering. A man in the crowd has an illness known as dropsy. This is an very painful illness where fluids in the body accumulate around the skin. The body seems swollen and disfigured. As you can imagine this man must of stood out in the crowd gathered at this meal. Jesus after seeing this man then poses a question to the pharisees and those who have studied the Law. A simple question. Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath. Before them is a man who has been suffering with painful illness and here stands Jesus, the one who has the power to heal him. Yet is it lawful for Jesus to do it?

You can hear a pin drop in the room. The same Pharisees who struggle with carrying food on the Sabbath, now must answer if Jesus can miraculously heal this man on the sabbath. Is it lawful? A long pause and no answer is given and Jesus calls the man

forward, heals him and sends him on his way. Jesus then turns and says: 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?" Jesus points to the hypocritical nature of their hearts. They would not think it ok to help this man, because it challenged their idea of what they could do on the sabbath. But if the problem was theirs, if their child or their property was in jeopardy, they would jump up to help. Their neighbor was less important than their idea of self-righteousness. Jesus calls them to be helpful to their neighbor, to love neighbor.

Next Jesus turns to those who were invited to this dinner party and he makes another observation. This time it isn't a man with an illness, but the attendees who saw themselves as important. He watched them as they chose the seats of honor for themselves. Jesus tells a parable or a story. He tells them not to sit in the place of honor, because think of the embarrassment and dishonor of being asked to move for someone else. Having to give up your seat because you thought you deserved it, but someone more important than you gets it and you have to move down the chain. How embarrassing.

Instead Jesus tells them to pick the worst seats in the house. So that when you are asked to come forward and take a better seat, you are not embarrassed, but honored. Jesus ends this story with this famous statement: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Those clamoring for the seat of honor like the first story has a problem with their heart. They view themselves as important compared to others. They matter and others don't. Their heart problem is the lack of humility. Jesus calls them to humble themselves.

Jesus tells one more story in our Gospel reading for today. This parable is about throwing feasts or banquets when you do so do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors. They can repay the favor that you have done for them. Your rich neighbor you have over can return the favor and invite you to their

house. Your relatives can always make you dinner and have you over. Jesus is telling us to expand our hospitality past those who can return the favor. Invite those so much in need that there is no chance they return your kindness to them. Jesus tells the dinner guest to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Do not invite those who can repay you, but invite those who can't. It will be your heavenly father who repays you at the resurrection of the dead. Jesus is asking those gathered to expand their idea of what it means to be hospitable. To go beyond the table they are gathered at with the invited guests and include those most in need. To be hospitable to those who cannot return the favor.

I do not think this dinner party went the way the leader of the pharisees thought. Jesus teaches the dinner party to help others, to love their Neighbor and not their sense of self righteousness. Jesus asks them to humble themselves, to view their neighbors as more important than themselves. Finally, Jesus calls them to be hospitable to those who can never repay.

So lets take these lessons we have learned and invite Jesus over to church here. To have dinner with us. What does Jesus observe about you and me as we sit around this table together. While we do not have to struggle with the question of the sabbath are being helpful to our neighbors? Are we loving our neighbors as we should? Have we not helped someone simply because it was an inconvenience to us? We see the homeless man in need of some help. The broken-down car, or the man changing a tire. Have we not helped someone because to be seen associating with someone like that might hurtful to how we view ourselves? Helping a wayward family member, helping someone of a different political persuasion. Have we stopped short of helping our neighbor when helping means tough conversations? What does Jesus see in you?

How does Jesus view us as we compare ourselves to others. Have we posted moments of our lives to social media, not with the pure heart to share our life, but to amass likes and clicks? Do we see our life in competition in material things and always make sure to find ourselves at the top? Do we view those who we work with as less important than ourselves? Putting us on a pedestal and driving down others to make ourselves look good? Are we humble or do we see ourselves better than others? What does Jesus see in you?

Finally how does Christ view our hospitality to one another. Do we invite others over to improve our social standing? Do we network not to reach out in love to others but to prop our own monetary interests up? How do we treat those in need around us? Do we invite them in and give to them what they could never pay back or do we see them as a nuisance and not worth our time. Are we hospitable to those in need or to serve our own purposes? What does Jesus see in you?

As we as Christians struggle with our sin, as we struggle to help our neighbor, to be humble and to be hospitable, we know we fall short. So like the Pharisees – we look to Jesus and we watch him carefully. We see a savior that came to His people to help. To love His creation, He preaches, teaches and performs miracles for their benefit. This same Jesus humbles himself. He Lowers himself to the role of a servant, God taking on human flesh that He might serve, that he might suffer and die for us. Humbling himself to death on a cross. Taking our sin and brokenness with him putting it to death on the cross with him. Finally he is hospitable to welcome us sinners to his resurrection table. Where he doesn't invite the righteous and perfect. He invites the ones who can never repay that debt. He invites you and me. He invites us to sit and to join Him in the marriage feast of the lamb which will have no end. Where we will celebrate, life and victory over sin, death and the grave.

As joyful recipients of this wonderful gift that we can never pay back. Let us follow the example of our Lord and Savior. As Christ helped, let us help our neighbor. Let no inconvenience, social taboo or anything stop us from showing the love of Christ first shown to us, to our neighbors. As Christ brought himself low and humbled himself for our sake, let us humble ourselves and treat our neighbor as if He is more important than we are. Let us take up a servant's heart not draw attention to ourselves but lift up those around us to the place of honor. Finally as we have been given a gift we cannot pay back let us do the same for others. Let us be hospitable for those who cannot ever give back to us what we give to them. To open our doors to the needy and weak in our lives. Helpful, Humble and Hospitable, God's people have been marked. Let us go forth from this place and be this to the world, knowing that our God in heaven sees us. In Christ holy name, amen.