

## The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

Luke 14:1-11

It seems like I've talked a lot lately about Law and Gospel. Jesus today gives us a master class in applying Law and Gospel to particular people. You know what the Law is. It's the Ten Commandments. It's "do this and live." It makes demands upon you that you cannot fulfill. You and I are sinners from birth and cannot keep the commandments, even as believers. All sinners, including you and I, need to hear the Law so that we know we have sinned against God's perfect standard. You also know what the Gospel is. It's the perfect life and sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of sinners. It's "look at what Jesus has done for you." It makes no demands upon you. All sinners, including you and I, need to hear the Gospel so that we know that our sins are forgiven and we have perfect standing before a holy God.

Sinners need to hear both Law and Gospel but not necessarily at the same time. C.F.W. Walther, one of the founders of our beloved LCMS, is responsible for a book called "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel." He has many theses that he expands upon in this book. It's not an easy read, but I would highly recommend it for your meditation. Dr. Walther was talking to seminary students embarking into the Holy Ministry, but it's really helpful for all of us during one on one interaction. Every thesis is amazing, but Thesis VIII is especially important for our meditation today. It goes...

*You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you preach the Law to those who are already in terror on account of their sins or the Gospel to those who are living securely in their sins.<sup>1</sup>*

In other words, those who are comfortable with their sins need to hear full-force law and should not hear the gospel. Forgiveness never gives you the freedom to sin however we want. Like Paul says, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!

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<sup>1</sup> Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible, CPH, 2010, Loc. 1518

How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2) Returning again to the sin of sex outside of marriage or pornography is like watching an alcoholic go into a bar. You know that nothing good will come of it. This is one of the reasons we remember our Holy Baptism every day. As the catechism says, our baptism “indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (LSC) Well, what about those who are terrified over their sin? What about those where their past sin seems to keep being brought up again and again? They need to hear full-force Gospel! They need to hear that no matter how black their sin is, their Savior’s blood covers it! Like Paul says, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25) Hearing the sweet forgiveness of sins is like being told your cancer is no longer! Nothing quite compares to it.

The Pharisees are comfortable in their sin. They have turned the Sabbath into a checklist of works that will satisfy God. They forget that the Sabbath is for man. They forget that God’s blessing is based on promise and not performance. They despise Jesus because He dares to heal on the Sabbath. They forget that the people they despise are created by God as well and should be shown mercy and compassion. They are like many of us in how we view the homeless. They don’t deserve any compassion. How dare they litter our churchyard! We have forgotten that it is only by God’s grace and kindness that we have material wealth or a comfortable life. The man with dropsy was most likely not invited by the Pharisees to the lunch but was probably outside hoping for some scraps from the banquet table. I wonder what our Jesus would do with Elvis, the homeless guy who has been littering our property?

Jesus knows the hardness of the Pharisees’ hearts. He knows why they are “watching Him carefully.” (v. 1) He knows that they disapprove of His healings on the Sabbath. So what does our Savior do? He heals a man with dropsy in their face. He’s a guest at the leader of the Pharisees and He heals the poor man in their face! Boom! Take that!

And then He shames them and points out their hypocrisy: “Which of you, have a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” (v. 5) They, of course, secure in their hypocrisy, have no answer. (v. 6)

Jesus gives them full-force law because of the hardness of their hearts. But why does He do this?

Is it just to show them up?

Is it just to shame them?

By no means. He wants them to see their hypocrisy and repent. Jesus “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4) Even the Pharisees, who openly hate Him and are the main force in having Him unjustly crucified! Think about that. The group of people that openly hated, mocked, and persecuted our Lord are objects of mercy for Him. Even though He knew what would happen. Would that we treat our enemies thusly!

Then He’s going to insult them further by telling a parable. He sees how they jockey for position and how they quibble over who should sit at the best table. He tells them this parable:

“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, 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. 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. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (vv. 8-11)

If you think this is just a lesson about humility, you miss the point. Jesus is mocking the Pharisees and giving them full-force Gospel at the same time. How is this not just a lesson on humility?

Consider Proverbs. What is the book of Proverbs primarily about? It is true that there is much practical wisdom in the book. Let's look at a proverb:

<sup>6</sup> *j*Go to <sup>k</sup>the ant, O <sup>l</sup>sluggard;  
consider her ways, and <sup>m</sup>be wise.  
<sup>7</sup> *n*Without having any chief,  
<sup>o</sup>officer, or ruler,  
<sup>8</sup> she prepares her bread <sup>p</sup>in summer  
and <sup>q</sup>gathers her food in harvest.

It is true that if you genuinely work hard, you will be rewarded and if you are smart with your money, you will have enough for retirement. But there are many people who work hard and have comfortable retirements that will spend their eternity in hell because they don't know Jesus. The proverbs first and foremost teach us about the Wisdom of God who is Jesus. To have true wisdom is to have Jesus. Likewise, there are many people who know how to humble themselves before other people who will suffer eternally because they don't know Jesus. To know true humility is to know Jesus Himself. That's the real point of Jesus' parable.

Jesus is describing Himself in this parable. I owe this insight to Pastor Peterson of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Jesus is highly exalted by the mere fact that He is the Word of God who created the heavens and the earth. He humbled Himself by being born of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. He humbled Himself so that He could defeat sin, death, and the devil as the second Adam so that all those born of the first Adam might have redemption through Him. Those who humble themselves He gives the right to be called children of God. He will exalt them on the last day in the

resurrection of the dead. Those who don't humble themselves will be cast away to the place prepared for Satan and his angels.

Jesus wants the Pharisees to humble themselves and believe in Him. He wants them to make the same confession that Peter made: "You, [that is Jesus,] are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16, Luke 9:20) He wants them to receive the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness before God that is found only in Christ.

We do the same thing when we confess our sins before God in the Divine Service:

"I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being."  
(LSB 184, Psalm 51)

You actually must believe these words. Saying them isn't enough. We need to say and believe them every week because they are true, but there's always the temptation to say them by rote and not really think about the words.

Do you actually believe them?

If you do not believe that you are a poor miserable sinner, then there is no forgiveness of sins for you! "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (v. 11)

And this is why we need to keep hearing the law! We can fool ourselves that we are 'good people.' But God doesn't save 'good people,' He only saves sinners. But because we are sinners plagued by the law day in and day out, we need to hear the sweet words, "In the

stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (LSB 185, John 20:19-23)

When you humble yourself before the Lord God Almighty and His terrifying Law, He will exalt you to the highest heaven. Thanks be to God for His wonderful mercy!

In Jesus Name. Amen.