

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

Proverbs 25:2-10

Hebrews 13:1-17

Luke 14:1-14

My mother taught me that the knife guards the spoon from the fork. One of my earliest chores was to set the table for dinner. It was to be done correctly. On the right side of the plate were the knife and the spoon. The sharp edge of the knife faced the plate and the spoon was placed outside the knife. The fork was placed on the left side of the plate. When dining, one is to use the fork furthest away from the plate for the first course. I learned that from the movie *Pretty Woman*. I was a fan of the television series *Downton Abbey*. The formal dinners looked glorious but I much preferred the company of the people in the kitchen. I think that I would have been more comfortable eating with the help in the kitchen than the fancy people at the fancy table. I know what a charger plate is but my interaction with them is about as frequent as my interaction with a tuxedo. Have you had memorable nights at the banquet table? High occasions are elevated by the beauty of a well-dressed table, excellent company, and exquisite food.

I can't imagine a single person in this holy house presumptuously demanding the seat of honor at a wedding banquet. I can't imagine a single person in this holy house brushing aside others in order to obtain a choice place of distinction at a festive banquet. But I know you like I know myself. Pride exists in your heart like it exists in mine. All pride needs is the right scenario to make itself unhappily known. Jesus goes to the house of a Pharisee, a *ruler* of the Pharisees, for the express purpose to eat bread. He is being watched carefully. A man with dropsy is on the scene. Dropsy is edema which is excess fluid in the body's tissue. The man is swollen; it's obvious. The condition is unpleasant, painful. Lawful; Jesus asks, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" (Luke 14:3). All the experts in the law were silent. Why? Is it *possible* that all of those experts in the law (Torah) had misunderstood God's Word? Is it possible that they had no sense of grace, no sense of mercy, no sense of sacrificial love? In the context of Jesus eating bread in the ruler of the Pharisees' house, the Lord healed a man... on the Sabbath... and Jesus talks about taking the lowest seat.

What Jesus noticed about those who had gathered for this dinner was that they were swollen with pride. It was dropsy of the soul, edema in the heart and mind and spirit. What do you suppose is the divine remedy for pride? Is it really humiliation? How many of you have ever suffered an episode where your pride was exposed and you couldn't find a hole quick enough to crawl into? Do believe that it's possible that Jesus may use something other than humiliation to inspire us to abandon that which is contrary to His nature, contrary to His will, contrary to the beauty that is inherent to humility? His teaching is straightforward: Take the lowest seat. Avoid embarrassment; it's all very practical. All of us would like to hear, "friend, move up higher." That would be way better than, "give your place to this person."

Barabbas had a place marked out for him. The place marked out for Barabbas was a Roman cross. A sentence of death had been handed to Barabbas. A murderer, an insurrectionist, perhaps a Zealot, perhaps he had *led* a rebellion, Barabbas now had an appointment with a very public execution. It wasn't a high place but a low place. No one was angling to dislodge Barabbas

from his appointed seat. Barabbas was truly guilty. He was a notorious prisoner, and he had secured for himself a notorious seat.

“Give your place to this person” (Luke 14:9). That is, ultimately, what God the Father said to Barabbas. Barabbas’ name means “son of the father” (Bar – Abba). Pontius Pilate asked the crowd who they wanted released as a gesture of reprieve (Matthew 27:17). It was a local Passover custom designed to reduce tensions among the Israelites – an act intended to diminish anti-Roman sentiment. The Pharisees, the supposed “experts in what is *lawful*,” incited the crowd to ask for Barabbas – son of the father (Matthew 27:20). We have a hymn with this line: “A murderer they save, The Prince of Life they slay. Yet cheerful He To suff’ring goes That He His foes From thence might free” (My Song Is Love Unknown ~ Lutheran Service Book 430).

I suspect that pride could well swell the soul of everyone here to a grotesque level until we realize who took the lowest seat in our place. The Father put His Son on that cross for Barabbas and for you. That is the lowest seat. Friend, give this seat of humiliation and suffering and death to my Son for He will save you from your sin. The greatest took that seat for you. Jesus, the true Bar-Abba, took that seat for you. He paid the price for your pride, and it was a wretched price. Our pride was crucified in the flesh of the Son of the Father. Pride hurts those it infects. Pride hurts those around the one it infects. The world promotes pride, so the world is promoting you to hurt those in your sphere. Is that how you want to live? We have been changed; born from above (John 3:3). We have been transformed (Romans 12:1-2). We have been brought out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). We belong to Christ. We have been crucified with Christ and we no longer live but Christ lives in us. The life we live in the body we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself up for us (Galatians 2:20). To gallantly, and elegantly, and quietly, and reverently, and humbly take the lowest seat is now in our nature. Jesus’ act of salvation informs how I am to live every day.

Friend, move up higher. I’ve been to St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. It’s impressive. There are nooks with side altars throughout the church. In such cathedrals, there is always a central altar which is referred to as the high altar. Again, these are visually impressive spaces. The architecture, the materials, the art, the gravitas of the holy – it is all beautiful. But remember, our Lord took the lowest seat. Our Lord said that He came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28). He tells us to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to our feast (Luke 14:13). Why? Because that’s what He does. He invites you. There is no higher seat than the one that He prepared for you by His death and resurrection. He invites you to His wedding banquet of forgiveness. Here you kneel in His presence and He feeds you with His body and blood. He took the lowest seat and now says to you, “friend, move up higher.” It is His humility that you feast on. He made Himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, being found in appearance as a man. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him (Philippians 2:1-11). And Jesus exalts you. How? By giving you His humility, His righteousness, His body, His blood. There is no higher seat, *anywhere*, than the one you occupy when you kneel at this altar.

It isn’t possible to live a higher life than one that serves our Lord and embodies His character. This body of believers is a royal priesthood. What makes us regal is not fancy cutlery or charger plates or what knowing what shape of a glass is for champagne. What makes us regal is that the

King of kings takes the lowest spot and serves us with the wonder of His sacrifice. And then, as Christians, as followers of Jesus, we endeavor to serve, to bless, to love those who are in our paths. We take the lowest seat naturally. We put our eyes on those most vulnerable – the weak, the marginalized, the forgotten. Pride is an unwelcome entity – are we agreed? We cannot repay the Lord for what He has given us, but we will watch Him carefully. The Pharisees were watching Jesus carefully, to see if He would do something that they could twist into a legal case against Him. We watch Him carefully in order to emulate His manner, to embody His teaching, to mirror His love, His charity, His grace. It's almost like setting the table of your soul.