

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 28-28, 2016
Luke 14:1-14

“Healing, Humility, and Hospitality”

The Olympics in Rio are over, summer vacation and travel are drawing to a close, and the start of a new school year is just around the corner. We are in this strange, in-between time that always leave me feeling rather out of sorts. Anybody else have this same feeling? We enjoyed the brief, fall-like reprieve in our weather this past week. It was lovely, wasn't it? But now we are back to summer-like weather with that triple H-factor of heat, haze, and humidity that Washington is known for. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus teaches about a different kind of triple H-factor. It's not heat, haze, and humidity, but healing, humility, and hospitality that are before us, and this becomes the focus of today's message. May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

First off, we are told about a miracle of healing which Jesus accomplished. The setting for this is a Sabbath dinner hosted by a ruler of the Pharisees, and we are told that **“they were watching him carefully”** (Luke 14:1). So was this some kind of set-up to trap Jesus? It may well have been, but that detail is not made clear. Tension is mounting as Jesus heads toward Jerusalem and what awaits him there: rejection by the religious leaders, betrayal by one of his own, suffering and death upon the cross, and ultimately resurrection from the dead. A man was there at the dinner with a medical condition: dropsy, which is an old-fashioned term for edema, a build-up of fluid in the body that results in painful swelling. Was the man a “plant” who was deliberately placed there by the Pharisees to see what Jesus would do? Again, that may well have been, but such a detail is not made clear. What is made clear is that Jesus recognized the need for healing in the life of this individual, even on the Sabbath, and recognizing that need, Jesus did something about it. As we well know, illness and disease do not respect special days, be they Sabbath, Christmas, Easter, or any other day. How many of us have spent holidays in the hospital because of a sick loved one? It happens, and when it does happen, what we desire most is that healing be forthcoming as soon as possible, no matter what day it is. This is the gift which Jesus comes to bring, even as we sing in that beloved Christmas carol:

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, Ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, Born that we no more may die,
Born to raise each child of earth, Born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn king!”
(Lutheran Book of Worship 60, stanza 3)*

The joy of Sabbath rest and worship instituted by God had become this heavy and onerous burden with all kinds of man-made rules and regulations about what was and was not allowed on the Sabbath. We are still very prone to erect all kinds of man-made rules and regulations about God and faith today, but they can just as easily obscure that “heav'n-born Prince of Peace” instead of pointing people to him. It comes down to the question Jesus asked: **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”** (Luke 14:3). Jesus who is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5) has come to bring healing and wholeness, life and salvation not only for the body, but for the sin-sick heart and spirit it. And bringing these gifts to us, Jesus now invites us to follow his own example and do good as we have opportunity.

Secondly, Jesus uses the setting of this Sabbath dinner to teach about humility. I don't think that these were Lutherans at this dinner because the people Jesus is talking about all chose the places of honor at the table. Just like church in which no self-respecting Lutheran *ever* sits in the front pew, so I just can't picture Lutherans elbowing their way to the places of honor at this Sabbath dinner. Still, some folks did,

and this becomes the teachable moment for Jesus to use. Jesus' directive mirrors what we hear in today's Old Testament lesson (Proverbs 25:2-10): **"Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble."** Jesus didn't just talk the talk here, He walked the walk, as Scripture tells us: **"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"** (Philippians 2:5-8). We can probably think of people in our own lives who exhibited humility, but if we want the truest example of humility, we have to look outside ourselves. We must look to Jesus, who humbled himself and gave his life upon the cross for our salvation. Jesus is both our sacrifice for sin and our model of the godly life. If He humbled himself, so must we in our own lives. This doesn't mean that we are to be a human doormat for people to wipe their feet on, but it does mean that we are willing and ready to roll up our sleeves, get our hands dirty, and do the work of serving, even as Jesus **"came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"** (Mark 10:45). In humbling ourselves, we do so trusting in Jesus' words that **"everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"** (Luke 14:11).

Finally, Jesus calls us to radical hospitality. He challenged the man who hosted the dinner (as well as all of us) to move beyond the tit-for-tat kind of hospitality where we can get caught up in inviting only people who can return the favor, who can help us make connections with people who will benefit us. Today's Epistle lesson (Hebrews 13:1-17) reminds us: **"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares"** (Hebrews 13:2). If you have ever been on the receiving end of a stranger's hospitality in your own hour of need, you know how humbling this really is. Jesus calls us to a different kind of hospitality than the world does, one that is rooted in grateful thanks for his gift of healing which has redeemed and restored us to a right relationship with God, and which blesses us in body, mind, and spirit. Jesus calls us to a different kind of hospitality, one that reflects humble joy in serving the needs of others: strangers, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And in doing so Jesus tells us, **"you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just"** (Luke 14:14). Over the summer as we been joining Jesus on his mission, we've had Party Pails available out in the Narthex for you to check out to host summer gatherings in your neighborhoods. There's been a little use of these, but not much. So we're going to re-launch this idea after Labor Day: think fall football games, tailgate parties, that sort of thing. Be thinking about Jesus' words on hospitality here and who you want to invite to your event.

That's the way it is on this Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, this final Sunday in August, as summer winds down and we head toward Labor Day and the start of the fall season. It's about healing, humility, and hospitality in and through Jesus. Now, having heard God's Word, what is God calling you to do? Take a moment now to reflect on this. Chew on this in the week ahead. We are called to be not just hearers of God's Word, but doers of his Word (James 1:22). Having heard God's Word, what is God calling you to do? May the Lord be glorified in our hearing and our doing – our living – of his Word, for Jesus' sake. Amen.