



15th Sunday after Penteco
September 22, 2019
Luke 14:1, 7-14

“Pride Destroys”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ,

Hardly a week ever goes by when we don't hear about some criminal committing some crime, right? This past week there was a shooting right here in Cheyenne that left two people dead and two people in serious, life-threatening condition. So, the question that we continually have to ask is, “Why do criminals commit crimes anyway?” The prevailing answer to that question in our modern times has been the thought that people commit crimes because of low self-esteem, that they think too low of themselves. In fact, I found a quote from Psychology Today that says that criminal behavior stems from a *“desperate attempt to compensate for a prevailing sense of inadequacy”* (Psychology Today). The criminal has to tear others down, control or overcome others in order to feel better about himself. So, you hear people say to criminals, “You're better than that!” As if having a higher opinion of yourself is what you need in order to not commit crimes. This idea that crime stems from having a low view of yourself is really just a modern idea. When you look at history, it's really been the opposite. The reason people did bad things was because of something called *hubris*, or pride, or a too high view of themselves. And why is it so popular to think that people do bad things because of a too low view of themselves? Because it shifts the blame off the person- it was all the negative influences that the person had that made them do what they did. So, you really just have to support them, build them up. But in previous times, if people did bad things because of too high a view of themselves, you called bad, bad and clamped down on the wrong-doer. And it makes sense: If I commit a crime it's because I feel I deserve this, I'm entitled to this.

So, what about you? What about me? Do you have a too low view of yourself or a too high view of yourself? We live in a world that is saturated with pride and the way that the world often tries to deal with this pride is by fueling more pride. We need to hear Jesus' words. Jesus addresses the insidious sin of pride in our text this morning. We're told that a prominent member of the Pharisees invited Jesus to his home to eat on a certain Sabbath. Now, given what we all know about the Pharisees and how they felt about Jesus, it's surprising that one of them would invite Jesus to a meal. However, then we notice why, **“he was being carefully watched.”** In other words, hypocritically, the Pharisees had invited Jesus so that they could perhaps find something wrong with him, something that they could accuse him with. But instead of them finding something wrong with Jesus, the exact opposite happens! Jesus finds something wrong with *them*!

Jesus observed how the people who were invited were vying for the places of honor at the table. Let's think about that for a moment. This shows what pride does. You see, the guests were not just happy and pleased and delighted to be at the meal and find enjoyment in the meal, no, their enjoyment was all tied up with being in a better place at the meal than someone else. That's what pride does. Pride puts us in this continual comparison game. Pride doesn't just take pleasure in having something, pride takes pleasure in having more of it than someone else. We might say someone is proud of their wealth, or their knowledge, or their good looks, but the reality is that person is proud of being richer, smarter, or better looking than someone else. If that person is all of a sudden in the presence of someone who has more money, more knowledge, or better looks, he loses all the pleasure that he had. Pride is this continual comparison game.

And Jesus illustrates just that. He points out how it works in the world. If you go to a wedding feast and you presumptuously take a place of honor and are feeling pretty good about yourself and someone more distinguished than you comes, the host will tell you to go to a less important place so the more distinguished person can sit in your seat and you'll be disgraced and humiliated. You were doing fine until someone more important than you arrived. So, pride not only puts you into this continuous comparison game it also sets you up for a fall. Then Jesus points out that even in the way the world works humility is better off because if you do go to a wedding and sit in a less important place, the host may move you to a better place.

Jesus illustrates a number of things that pride does to a person. Three things we can see from this illustration: pride makes someone empty, busy, and hurt. First, pride makes someone empty. Notice what they are doing. They are trying to find their sense of worth, value, identity, enjoyment in life...in what?? In having a better seat at the table than someone else! They feel

that it's so important to have a particular seat at this dinner. A pastor once said, *"If you try to put anything in the middle of the place that was originally made for God it's going to be too small."* (Tim Keller). But what empty things are you and I looking to for our sense of worth in life? Our career? Our talents? Our family? Our stuff? If it's anything but God, it's going to leave us empty. Pride also makes someone busy. It always playing this comparison game. It's not about being at the dinner, it's about having a better place at the dinner than someone else. It's not about having a godly spouse, it's about having a better looking or more capable spouse than someone else. But the truth is, you never win by comparing. It will either lead you to view yourself too highly – as if you're better than someone else, or it will lead you to view yourself too lowly by thinking you're worse than others. And finally pride makes you hurt. Pride comes before a fall. The famous pastor Charles Spurgeon said, "Every person has a choice between being humble or being humbled." If I'm looking for my self-worth from anything other than God – from my successes in life, from my good grades, from my income or career, from what people say about me, it will inevitably fail me. Someone will give a harsh bit of criticism and I'll be terribly troubled by it, constantly turning it over in my mind, keeping me up at night.

The opposite of pride is humility. And what is humility? Humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it's simply thinking of myself less. You see, the insidious nature of pride is that it causes you to always think of yourself and what's going to benefit you. The way you relate to someone else is how are they going to benefit you. In Jesus' 2nd parable here that's what Jesus is saying. Don't invite your friends, relatives or rich neighbors to your dinner, because you want to get something from them, you want to be repaid – you're still thinking about yourself if you do. Rather, invite the poor, crippled, lame and blind- they can't repay you. In other words, you're doing what you're doing totally in service to others instead of service to self.

So how do you get there? How do criminals get to a place of humility where they are no longer feeling like they deserve whatever it is that they are expecting to get out of their crime? How do you get to a place where you're not constantly feeling better about yourself based on what you do or don't have, what others think of you or where your seat is at the dinner? How do you get there?

Jesus gives us the indication here. It's at the very end of the text where Jesus says **"at the resurrection of the righteous."** He's pointing to the Last Day. Who are these "righteous" ones? Those are believers. The word righteous is the word *dikaioi* and it's a courtroom term. You see, if you're prideful, you'll always be in a sort of courtroom. You're always looking for a verdict, what are people going to think of me? What are they going to think if I sit at this place at the dinner table? You're seeking to impress, if you're the best one in the room – you're doing great, if someone better comes along, you're devastated. The verdict in the courtroom is always determined by what other people think or what you think of yourself.

God gives us the real answer to pride. The key to a humble life, the key to a self-forgetful life is taking to heart what Jesus calls you here. He calls you "righteous." It's a courtroom term and it means "innocent." Now wait a minute, I know I'm not innocent, I'm guilty, I'm prideful, I'm arrogant, I'm sinful!" But that's why Jesus came, he came to go to court for you. He was judged guilty and he paid the sentence with his death on the cross for all your pride and all your sin. And not only that, God has taken Christ's perfect performance and has imputed that to you as if it were your own. And so God can look at you and me and say, just like he said of Jesus, **"You are my son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased."**

Almost everything in life and every false religion in the world runs on performance leading to a verdict. If you perform well, if you do this, if you do that, if you're good then you'll be rewarded. But God's way is so different. In God's way, the verdict leads to the performance. The trial is over, the verdict is in, the court is adjourned: you're innocent, your sins are forgiven, you've been washed clean, you're God's child. And you know what that means? That means you can live with humility and self-forgetfulness. You already have all the worth, all the significance, all the value for eternity in Jesus your Savior and with that you can stop trying to impress others or even impress yourself, but just serve others for the joy of serving. Amen.