

## **Sermon Draft for August 31, 2025**

**Text: Luke 14:1-14**

**Sermon: “Our Place”**

Each Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Each Sunday is an opportunity for God’s people to gather for his feast, kneeling together at the Lord’s table to eat his body and drink his blood. In worship we come together as brothers and sisters in Christ, who is the same ***“yesterday and today and forever”*** (Hebrews 13:8).

Luke records four incidents of Jesus’ interaction with the Pharisees over the “requirements” of the Sabbath. In Luke 6:1–5, Jesus is questioned because his disciples were accused by the Pharisees of doing ***“what is unlawful, on the Sabbath”*** (v 2). The disciples were picking some heads of grain and rubbing them in their hands to eat the kernels. The issue, of course, was not about property rights or trespassing but about the meaning and purpose of the Sabbath.

Soon after this controversy, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand (6:6–11). Luke notes that the Pharisees and teachers of the law were looking for a reason, to accuse Jesus, **“so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath”** (v 7). When Jesus healed the man, his enemies were **“furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus”** (v 11).

In Luke 13:10–17, the synagogue ruler criticizes Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. In response, Jesus decries the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who promote and preserve animal life on the Sabbath but refuse to allow Jesus to heal and preserve the life of God’s children. Luke reports that Jesus’ **“opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing”** (13:17).

Immediately before today’s reading, Jesus laments the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets (13:34). The temple is, in fact, desolate outwardly beautiful and glorious, but with no substance or presence of God within.

Again, on the Sabbath, a man suffering from dropsy appears before Jesus. Knowing the Pharisees' thoughts, Jesus asks whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. ***“But they remained silent”*** (14:4). Rather than humbly admitting that they did not know the correct answer, or even that they were struggling to understand how Jesus could be so seemingly cavalier about the Sabbath rituals, the Pharisees refused to respond.

It's universally true. It was true back when Solomon wrote the Old Testament book of Proverbs, it was true when Jesus spoke his parable in our Gospel and it's true today: Perhaps nothing is more humiliating than when a person doesn't know his or her place, tries to get uppity, a social climber and then gets exposed, put down, put in her or his rightful, lowly place.

Jesus tells the story of the wedding guest in our text, and it's part of a larger teaching by Jesus about humility or exalting oneself. Now as then, Jesus would counsel us toward humble service rather than exalting ourselves.

The concept is timeless, but there's an added dimension, know your place of humility and compassion.

And for Christians, there's a deeper motivation. Our place is with the man with dropsy, suffering and disfigured, made whole by Christ (vs 1–6). In our text, a man with dropsy knows his place. Luke, the doctor, uses the medical term for what we would call edema. This poor man was literally puffed up by water retention. It was terribly painful; everyone could see his ugly disfigurement. He knew his place as a pitiful sufferer.

But also in our text are others who don't know their place. The Pharisees were ***“watching” Jesus “carefully”*** (v 1). It appears this was all a setup; they had brought the poor man as a trap to see if Jesus would heal him on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees were puffed up with pride, disfigured by their sin, including their plotting.

But Jesus puts them in their place. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Surely anyone would help his son or even an ox in need on a Sabbath (v 5). So surely this man! The Pharisees **“could not reply”** (v 6). No one could argue with Jesus’ loving logic. They were humiliated!

We are in the place of the man with dropsy. We are often puffed up and disfigured by our sin. We are often mocked by the world. But we, like the suffering man in our text, are welcomed by Jesus and made whole by him. Without the Pharisees’ approval, Jesus heals the man with dropsy (v 4). Jesus doesn’t turn away in disgust at our ugly sin. He came to take hold of us and forgive us.

Our place is the lowest one, to be exalted by Christ’s humility (vs 7–11). Here’s the timeless wisdom, seating at the wedding reception.

Solomon makes the identical point in our Old Testament reading

***“Take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness. Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence or stand in the place of the great”***

(Proverbs 25:6–7).

But there’s an important caveat: We can’t take the lowest place as a strategy to gain honor, to get a higher seat. If we do, it’s just a more clever way to do our social climbing. Taking the lowest place to avoid embarrassment or to gain honor are both self-serving.

The one person whose motivation was purely selfless was Jesus. He took the lowest place in going to the cross. He did that solely to take hold of me and you to make whole and forgiven of our ugly puffed-up sins. His humiliation is our exaltation! We know our place, we belong in the lowest place like the man with dropsy but Jesus exalts: ***“Friend, move up higher”*** (v 10). Our place is as the one invited by Christ: to serve (vs 12–14).

Most people know better than to take the highest place at a wedding reception. But the scenario Jesus describes not only happens in our text but all the time even today; it's actually worldly wise: Hang with the power people; invite to your party those who can help you. It's what the Pharisee was doing. We do it all the time. We scout the room and look for the boss. We look around the narthex for a friend who's easy to talk to. We invite to our Labor Day cookout the cool people we already like.

Unfortunately, most of us, more often than not, probably feel we're the ones not invited, not on the "A-list." And many things besides cocktail parties make us feel that way: the crosses we bear in life, loss of health and physical vigor, financial straits, and, of course, God's Law that shows our sin. Our place is among the poor, crippled, lame, and blind.

But those are the ones Jesus invites to his banquet. The world delights in humbling the proud; we love to see the uppity get their comeuppance. But the world rarely seeks to exalt the humble. Jesus is the host who serves us (22:27). He invites us, the poor, crippled, lame, and blind, to his eternal banquet, to eat and drink at his table now and forevermore (22:30). That compels us to do the same.

We are invited guests to the grandest gathering, the most sought-after invitation on the circuit. That includes more food and favors than we could enjoy for eternity.

Our place is as the one Jesus invites to serve. Jesus sends us forth as laborers into the field to love and serve our neighbor, to care for those in need with the gifts entrusted to us, and to bring them to Jesus.

***“We love because he first loved us”*** (1 John 4:19). We love one another as he loved us (John 15:12). Our love for others proceeds from our faith.

By faith we know the love of God for us in Christ Jesus by looking to the cross and seeing there the perfect and complete atonement for our sins. The faith that looks to Jesus is the faith freed to love and serve the neighbor with the gifts bestowed on us by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We seek out the poor, crippled, lame, and blind, that they, too, would come to know the saving work of Christ for them.

This we do for them and their sake. We do not love that we might receive something from them. What more could we receive than what we already have in Christ? We love the other for the sake of the other. This is the freedom of the Gospel and the opportunity given to us as baptized children of God.

Amen