



Pentecost 15
September 5, 2010
Luke 14:1, 7-14

We Are All Beggars

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever. Amen.” (Psalm 118:1) God’s Word for our consideration today is recorded in Luke 14. (*Please Stand - Read Text*)

In the days following Martin Luther’s death, his friends looked through his personal effects to find any valuables before giving away his clothing. As they dug through the pockets of his clothing, only one slip of paper was found in his overcoat. It was well worn and on it were the words in Latin and German – “Hoc est verum. Wir sind alle Bettler.” “This is true. We are all beggars.” Does that seem strange to you? “We are all beggars.” It almost seems like a despairing thought.

I. Know your place.

Well, the theme of this sermon is just that: “We are all beggars.” Basically, I am saying with this sermon (and I include myself in this), “You are nothing but a helpless beggar.” Are you offended? Does that upset you? Ask yourself why that is. Why don’t we want to be known as beggars. It’s because deep down you and I think we’re not.

The Pharisees didn’t think so either. In fact, they thought they were in the position to judge Jesus in our text. But in reality, Jesus was watching them to expose them for what they are – for what we are: beggars. As the guests came in to dine, Jesus noticed something that betrayed their proud natures. Jesus saw them taking the positions of honor – clamoring for the spots right next to the host. So Jesus did what he liked to do so often to win them back – he told a parable to show them and us our place at the banquet.

Jesus talked about a wedding feast. Imagine your own wedding reception. Everyone is finding their seats for the meal when you notice a problem developing. Someone who just barely “made the cut” to your reception is up at the head table sitting next to the bride and groom’s spot. What has to happen next is embarrassing for everyone. You need to take the best man with you and say to the intruder, “Give this man your seat.” But, then as you look to the last table at the back of the room, you notice a dear friend who has been with you through thick and thin sitting by himself. What has to happen next is an honor. You get to go to him and say, “Friend, move up to a better place.” So, when it comes to our lives, which description fits us? Do we think of ourselves as honored guests or as beggars?

Two weeks ago I was performing a marriage in Milwaukee and on the day of the wedding, I wanted to finish memorizing my sermon, so I went to a park. While I was memorizing, a beggar came up to me with his “story.” What do you suppose my first thought was? “Oh, great, now I have to talk to this guy.” Notice my first thought was about *me* and how this man’s presence affected *me*. Would your reaction have been similar? My second thought was, “Oh, great, now I’ll have to give him money.” Notice my second thought was again about *me*. Would your reaction have been similar? Finally, my third thought was, “Okay, I’ll give him a ten dollar bill just to get rid of him.” After-all I wanted to memorize my sermon. Notice, my third thought was again about *me*. Would your reaction have been similar? If it is, shame on you...and shame on me.

The truth is that in God’s eyes, we’re all beggars. Any thought to the contrary is arrogance and pride. Physically speaking, those with mansions are no better than those with shacks and those with high paying jobs are no better than those with low and those with lots of friends are no better than those with few. God is the one who blesses us with everything from the least ability to the greatest opportunity. He is the only one with the means to help.

The same is true spiritually speaking. We are all sinners. We are all damned to hell on our own. We all have the same Savior. We are all going to heaven because of that same Savior and not because of anything in ourselves. Literally, we are all in the same boat. Then why do we sometimes think that there must be something good in us because we believe while others don’t? Why do we often look down on the sins of others like rapists and murderers and cover over ours as “not as bad?” That’s not humility, that’s pride.

So what’s the solution? Well, maybe we should just look at our lives and decide to be more humble. That’ll work, right? Wrong! My “self” is the problem! Notice the gravitational pull to yourself – the way I can manage to make everything in my world end up being about my needs, my wants, and my feelings – this is the very opposite of humility. You can’t just decide to be more humble and then be more humble. In fact, what do you think when someone says “Oh, you’re so humble?” Be honest, you look at yourself and think, “yeah, I am pretty humble...maybe

even the humblest person I know!” and in less than a second after receiving the compliment, you become proud! It’s not *what* I think of myself, but *that* I do – irresistibly, without fail – that is the source of my spiritual pride!

So what is the solution? How do you gain true humility? That’s simple. Look at Jesus. Watch him as he constantly focuses on those outside of himself though he was the only one with every right to focus on himself: Helping a wedding couple he barely knows by turning water into wine. Eating and drinking with social outcasts and enemies, just trying to win them over - just like you see in our text before us today. As Jesus cared for these people, he was really caring for you – carrying out perfectly what we could never do on our own. And the greatest display of humility came on the cross. He could have said, “Let these who think they don’t need me suffer for their pride!” Instead he spoke the final word on our guilt once and for all: “It is finished!”

Don’t you see? We sit in these pews with our heads down and confess that we are “by nature sinful, deserving *only* death and punishment” – in other words, “we’re beggars!” Yet, at the same time we confess that, we lift our eyes to see that we are standing at the foot of the cross. There we see the source of our greatest pride. There our heavenly Father speaks to us, “Friend, move up to a better place!” And we fly! We fly straight through the gates of heaven and into our heavenly Father’s lap. It’s just what Jesus said, “he who humbles himself will be exalted.” You have been given the exalted status of God’s child! Your life is one big banquet of God’s goodness!

II. Invite your fellow beggars.

So who will you invite to the banquet of your life? Jesus went onto say, “*When you give a dinner, don’t just invite your friends, relatives and rich neighbors – if you do, they may pay your kindness back to you. Instead invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.*” So who do you love in your life – that is, invite to the banquet of your life?

Honestly, it’s easy to be kind to those we want to like us. It’s easy to do nice things for those we want a favor from in return. It’s easy to love those you have a lot in common with or who have been blessed with great gifts from God to help you in your life. But don’t stop there. Jesus didn’t.

Who does Jesus invite to his banquet? Who does he tell to come here to this altar and receive his body and blood. He wants the poor, crippled, lame and blind sinners to come forward. He doesn’t invite his friends – not Gabriel or Michael or any of the hosts of heaven, but you and me – beggars, who recognize the low position that sin has placed us in. And yet, in this Supper, Jesus comes to you and you alone at that moment and says with his body and blood, “Friend, move up to a better place.” And as we receive that precious food for our souls, we fly...to the highest heights of heaven!

So now, who will you invite to the banquet of your life and truly love? Invite the poor – those in your life that don’t have it all. Invite the crippled – those in your life that can’t stand for themselves. Invite the lame – those in your life that offer you no benefit in your association with them before others. Invite the blind – those in your life that have sinned against you or are lost in sin – show them Jesus.

And you know what? We all have a unique opportunity to invite people to see Jesus both in the way we use our gifts in this life and in the way we invite them to see Jesus in worship here. Over the next two weekends, we have some special things going on. Next week, we’ll have a ministry fair, where you’ll be able to see all the ministry that happens at Immanuel – you’ll also see all the opportunities for you to use your gifts, not for yourself, but for your neighbors here at Immanuel and in this community. Use your gifts for the LORD by using those gifts to serve others – that is true humility. Then on the weekend of September 19th, we’ll have our “Celebration of Grace” (which is our community open house). What an awesome chance to invite everyone you know from your family and friends to the poor, crippled, lame and blind in your life. Let them enjoy the feast of God’s forgiveness that you enjoy!

So now you understand, when Luther reminded himself, “We are all beggars,” he wasn’t being negative. Instead that piece of paper reminded him that everything from a crumb of bread to the golden streets of heaven, is entirely God’s gift - nothing in our hands we bring. And when we come in humility and know our proper place, God comes to us and says, “Friend, move up to a better place.” *For he who humbles himself will be exalted.* Thank God, then, that we are all beggars. Amen.

“The LORD’s right hand is lifted high; the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. Amen.” (Psalm 118:16-17)