

2 September 2007
Pentecost 14

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Truly Open Door”

Text: Luke 14:1-14 (Hebrews 13:1-17)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pride is a tricky thing, because it comes in so many shapes and sizes, and manifests itself in so many ways. Some of them obvious, and some not so obvious.

Pride is something we all have, though none of us likes to admit. You do not have to be invited to a banquet to vie for the seats of honor. That is a competition in which we are all involved – in our families, in our workplaces, among friends, and even in the church. It is why I feel gyped when something is done for another but not for me. It is why I lash out at others when they do not do for me what I want, or what I think I deserve. It is why I look down on others when they do not live up to *my* expectations. It is why I feel slighted when I do not receive recognition for my efforts, or my faithfulness. It is why I get disappointed with others – because pride sees the sin in them and overlooks (or excuses) the sin in me.

Pride begins with me. I am the starting point and everything and everyone else is judged in comparison. Even God. It is sin and selfishness lived to their logical conclusion. And so even when I take the lowest seat, it is with the prideful expectation of being moved higher! Humility is used as a way to receive more praise. Even confession of sin can be turned into the pride of greater self-examination than the next guy! And so pride is rightly one of the seven deadly sins, because it focuses all on me – and takes my eyes off of Christ, the source of our life.

But in contrast to all of that today is the man in the Holy Gospel with dropsy. He is so easily overlooked in today’s reading, but he is really the key. He knows who he is. No pride here. He is not one of the beautiful people. Not popular. He is considered a loser. He is alone. He is afraid. He is marred and outcast. He has

nothing to give, he can only receive. He is swelled not with pride, but with the effects of his disease, making him look grotesque. He is there because the traditional piety of that time said to have your door open for the stranger and the poor – which the Pharisee did . . . but with the expectation that no fool of a stranger or person in need would take this seriously and actually come in! But if he did, you could always stare him down, or make him feel uncomfortable in other ways, so that he'd leave and not be so presumptuous again! After all, who wants such a person ruining a perfectly good dinner party . . . or (to put it in more contemporary terms) who wants such a person ruining a perfectly good Divine Service, or a perfectly good vacation, or a perfectly good Sunday afternoon nap, or our perfectly good, well-planned, laid out life!

You see, pride doesn't like messes. It likes everything where and how *I* want it to be. Everything and everyone in its place. No surprises. No inconveniences.

Perhaps that's why there are always messes around Jesus. For while this man entered through the open door of the Pharisee, it is not to the Pharisee that he has come, but to Jesus, whose open door is a truly open door; whose invitation is a true invitation; and whose grace is true grace. And when you truly open your door, you know whose going to come in? *The poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, the sinful* messes like you and me. We who have nothing to give, but who have come to receive from the goodness of our Saviour. His forgiveness, life, and love. The gifts He has come to give to us who need them. For the exalted One has humbled Himself and come into this world of sin to pull His sons and daughters out of the pit of sin and give them life. The life that we so desperately need.

And so we come, not in pride but in truth – swelled and grotesque with sin and failure, and confess our sin. We use the words printed in the hymnal, but sometimes not even with those – but with the speechless, simple silence of the drowsy man, standing before our Lord in silent expectation. To hear again His wonderful Word that washes us clean, returning us to the pristine state of our Baptism: *I forgive you all your sin*. No matter who you are. No matter your past, present, or future. No matter how disfigured with sin. You are mine.

But our Saviour is not content with that – with inviting us in but then relegating us to a seat in the corner or in the back! – but also then gives us who have no right to

even be here a seat of honor at His banquet table, so that He can serve us! Even with His own body and blood. The medicine of immortality. The food of eternal life, the fruit from the tree of the cross. For it is on the cross where the One with the highest place freely took the absolute lowest place; where the greatest became the least; where the perfect One became the greatest sinner – taking our sin, that we might have His place at the head of the Table. The place where sons sit! Because in Christ, you *are* a son, and the Father loves you so, and exalts you with an exaltation higher than we could ever exalt ourselves.

And this is so because the One who opened the door of mercy to us is the One who opened the door of the tomb, defeating the sin and death that held us captive and not only setting us free, but giving us life. A new life. A life filled no longer with pride but with love; no longer with sin but with forgiveness; no longer with gossip but with prayer. Not pretending that the sin and messes of our lives aren't there, but knowing that they are, and that we cannot fix ourselves, and that *here* is the healing and the forgiveness that we need. That we simply cannot live without. That became yours in Holy Baptism, as Jesus' life became your life, His sonship your sonship, His victory your victory, His empty grave your empty grave. All that you need for life and salvation given to you at once, that the door of the tomb and the door of Heaven be now open for you.

And so the words of Jesus that we heard today are not so much a lesson in humility or table etiquette, as they are a Gospel for us, showing us the wonderful work of our Saviour for us. Our Saviour who *took the drowsied man, healed him, and sent him on his way*, and has done the same for us – taking us in Holy Baptism, healing us with His absolution, and sending us out with His food, strength, and blessing. Out into the vocations He has given us, that as He has opened the door to us, we too may so do for others. Not because we have too. Not because that's what the "traditional piety" tells us to do. But because that's what the love of God in Christ Jesus compels us to do. The Gospel *given* to us also now *lived* in us.

And that, in the upside-down way of the Gospel, is also *moving up higher!* Even though it looks to the world like moving down. But in opening the door of mercy and loving, serving, and forgiving as Jesus has done for us, is this not to be in His place? For secure as sons and daughters of God in Christ Jesus, we can now *freely* take our place with the least. With those in need, whether that be those in our

church, in our families, in our neighborhoods, or like those we heard about in the reading from Hebrews: the strangers, those in prison, those who are mistreated, those under oppression, those messed up in sin and death. Not in order to be repaid, but because we have already received what is far beyond the price of silver and gold – the body and blood and life of Jesus, which will never end.

What will end are the things of this world. But when they do, Jesus wants you to know, the door will still be open to you. For we will enter that heavenly sanctuary, where our Bridegroom and His unending feast is waiting for us. And if you want to picture that in your minds, think of the last wedding you were at, when the bride stood at the entrance of the church looking to her groom, and the groom stood at the front, filled with joy and love for His bride. So it will be in that day for you and me, as the Spirit leads us to Christ Jesus, and Jesus takes us to the Father as His own. When all sin, pride, division, heartache, pain, and tears will be gone. When we who have suffered here with Him, will there be glorified with Him. (Rom 8:17)

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.