

Pentecost 15 8/28/16
Luke 14:1-14 17C

FOR EVERYONE WHO EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLLED, AND HE WHO HUMBLLES HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED.

Ty Cobb, some would argue, was the greatest baseball player of all time. After all, he set 90 major league baseball records in his playing career. But, his playing legacy is overshadowed by his surly temperament. He was an avowed racist, who alienated teammates and fans alike. He is as well-known for his profanity-laced shouting matches and fights, both on and off the field, as for his playing ability.

Once, he went to the hotel after a game, only to find a teammate already in the bathtub; this being the early years of the 20th-century. Outraged, Cobb dragged him from the tub, jumped in fully clothed, and yelled, "Don't you know that I just have to be first."

Now, before you put on your little Pharisee gown this morning and shout your disgust at Ty Cobb, maybe you should look at all the times and in all the ways you have to be first, especially in light of Jesus' words this morning.

One Sabbath, Jesus went to the home of a Pharisee. Jesus was invited not to have a delicious meal for His body, but so that this Pharisee and his cronies could keep their eyes on Jesus. You see, they were watching and waiting for him to do something wrong – to show that He was a sinner.

But, the Pharisee and his cronies were not the only ones watching. Jesus was watching them. When the dinner bell rang, the contest was underway to get the greatest place of honor at the dinner table. Here they

were – these religious leaders – pushing and shoving, doing everything they could to get a place of honor at the table.

Can you imagine such behavior? Well, you tell me. When you were a kid, how much scheming and maneuvering did you do to make sure you got the biggest piece of cake? When you have a disagreement, a heated discussion, with your spouse, do you wait for the apology, even when you were in the wrong? When the boss calls a meeting at work, do you get there just a minute early to get a seat next to the boss to make yourself look important? When you go to the stadium for a football game, where would you rather sit -- the 50-yard line, or the nose-bleed section?

We like the place of honor. Sure ya do. We like the place of honor because we think more highly of ourselves than our neighbor, and we live in a world that teaches, trains us to think that we should have the place of honor. As kids, that purple dinosaur told us, “You are remarkable, you’re the only one like you.” And we buy into that. Play some game and you get a trophy or a medal, not because you or your team won the championship, but just because you showed up. You go have a burger for lunch, and you can have it your way.

We all like to have those places of honor just as much as the Pharisees at the dinner table with Jesus. They were the religious leaders; the elite of society. Shouldn’t they have known better? Shouldn’t they have been shown better behavior? Jesus Himself says, “no”. He tells us they were hungry for power and position, so they could be lord over their neighbors. Jesus said they “like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces” with all kinds of fancy names. They believed they deserved to be first. Their thinking was that people approved of them, so God most certainly must approve of them.

But, God didn't approve at all. Remember, Jesus was watching. And He told them a story,

When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus is teaching us a lesson and that lesson is this: self-honor is no honor at all. Self-honor will fail and will fail dramatically. Like when your host comes and says, "Give your place to this person." Jesus is teaching us honor comes from someone else and that honor is born of humility.

And no one knew that better than Jesus. He had the highest place in heaven and earth – the right hand of God from all eternity. There, He had more authority, more power, more honor than anyone could ever dream of having. It was all His. What did He do with it? He set it all aside. Paul says it this way,

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by 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 (Ph 2).

The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus came from heaven above to take the lowest seat for you. He took from you all your sins, your pride, your arrogance, your self-honor, all those times you insisted on being first, and He carried them all to the cross. There upon that lowest seat of all, He

shed His blood and gave His life obedient unto death for you, to forgive you all your sins.

For three days, He was dead in the tomb, humble as humble can be. But the 3rd day, God the Father said to Him, “Friend, move up higher,” and raised Him to life, life everlasting. He was raised up for you, to give you all that He had. Again, Paul puts it this way,

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Ph 2).

Jesus humbled Himself, but God the Father exalted Him to His own right hand. There, He sits waiting for His wedding feast to begin. And what joy there is in that for you, Dear Child of God.

You entered this world sitting in the lowest seat, the one marked sinful and unclean. And that meant you had no place at the wedding feast of Jesus. But, someone came to you, and said to you, as He said to Declan this morning, “Friend, move up higher.” That someone was God Himself. He took you and joined you to Jesus Christ by means of water and the Word, so that you died with Jesus and rose with Jesus. And you went from being that unclean sinner who deserved only God’s temporal and eternal punishment, to having the highest place anyone could ever have – being a Child of God.

And, you can put those words of Jesus at the dinner party into action, right here, right now, by living the most humble of lives. Any piece of cake, that’s fine with you. You seek to live at peace with all people, especially your spouse, so your love keeps no record of wrongs. As a child of God, you know your honor and glory is not in this world. The world will never

think humility is wise. But for you, that day is coming when God will say, "Friend, move up higher." That day, He will take you to heaven to be forever with Jesus, dress you in a white robe, crown you with the crown of life, and you will take your place at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Knowing who you are and where you are going allows you to live a life of humility here, today. For Jesus says, "Everyone who exalts Himself will be humbled, and He who humbles Himself will be exalted."