

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” These words of Jesus call us to repentance and proclaim the gospel. It’s something important for us to hear as our Lord says these words and teaches us.

We need to hear this because it’s counter to our sinful nature. Our old man doesn’t like to be humbled because he thinks highly of himself. That’s what sin does. Sin and humility don’t go together. Sin doubts God’s word and places oneself above the Bible and, in turn, above God himself. That’s quite something when you think about it and what Jesus says in the Gospel reading as he teaches the people and us with the parable, “Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ‘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.’”

It isn’t too complicated and we can relate to it or at least get what Jesus is saying. Yet we always don’t live our lives like Jesus teaches us. We do want to have the place of honor. We want to be somebody. One thing that is common, especially in our world today is this sense of thinking we deserve what we want. Look at what is resonating with many people today and growing more and more popular. We want things like free health care and a free college education to name just two of a handful of things. Or think about how loudly some circles proclaim that distinctions are bad and tries to write all of history and our society through some struggle between those who lack being oppressed by those who have. Communism, for example, wants to think social economic distinctions and classes impede some notion of a utopia where everyone shares all things in common. What gets marketed as trying to create a heaven on earth ends up creating a living hell on earth. Unless there is chaos then there can be no honor, at least that’s how the fallen world thinks.

The fact that there are some who have authority over others in temporal things is part of God’s created order in the family, church, and society. It’s actually good. There is honor in how God has ordered things even when someone may have a place of authority over another in a various position in life. It’s not surprising that communism is godless. In terms of the things of this world, not everyone is a king and not everyone gets to sit at the head table. Different offices and roles have authority over one another. Men and women are different. Husbands and wives are different. Parents and children are different. Pastors and hearers are different. Government and citizens are different. Teachers and students are different. Employers and employees. These orders of creation are important for us to know and understand and see them for the godly establishment the Lord has instituted. There is dignity in all these things. The honor before God is the same as a king and his subject are both sinners and saved only by Christ but this doesn’t overthrow the order within this world which the Lord has created.

It’s no wonder why when we want to dismiss orders in creation that we treat and see God as we do. As much as those things may be absurd this goes even more ridiculous when we try to look at our place before God. God is our King and we are his people; it’s not the other way around. “Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, ‘Come up here,’ than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.” The sinner in us doesn’t show any respect, he delights in his own self, doesn’t lack in his love of self, and shows no humility. He exalts himself. In Proverbs 18 God says, “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.” That’s really what we see when we look at ourselves apart from the wisdom of God. It’s who we are when we refuse to repent of our sin and seek to despise God’s word and the gifts he gives. It’s who we are when we seek to place ourselves above our neighbors and think we are better than them. It’s sinful and the only exaltation we will receive is in the imagination of our own fallen, foolish, hearts.

God has harsh words for this way of thinking and living. He deals harshly with those who would put themselves forward and think they are high and mighty in whatever form this may be and be known. This is why God calls us to listen to him. In that reading from Proverbs we heard, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear. Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the soul of his masters. Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give.” To humble yourself under the mighty hand of God is listen to his words and what the Lord teaches you. It’s to lean not on your own understanding but have your whole mind, heart, and life conformed to the word of God which alone is trustworthy and true. It’s to confess your sin and see God’s righteous anger and wrath against it. It’s to say, “Lord, have mercy upon me.”

Jesus said, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” With these words the Lord preaches to you what he has accomplished for you in Christ. “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 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.”

The great reversal in what you hear before you today is found in Jesus who humbled himself for your sake. In 2 Corinthians 5 God says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus exalts you because he has humbled himself. This is the wonderful reality you see in what God has done for you in Christ. Confessing your sin, you claim nothing of your own to deserve salvation and no place before God. God in his mercy says to you, “your sin is forgiven, come forward and sit here in this place of honor because of what Christ has done.”

There’s great comfort in all this as you see that God, the King, exalts you. You are his dear child and he cares for you. Though you have and deserve nothing he has given you everything in Christ. As you go through this world you have this confidence. You have been called to this new life and though it may be difficult at times for the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh will fight against you as a Christian you know that your real honor is before God and that’s the only honor that matters unto everlasting life. God’s exaltation of you, your redemption, is eternal and will last forever. The accolades and glory of men are nothing in comparison to what you have forever with God in his Kingdom. Though the devil rears his ugly head, though your sinful flesh tries to tempt you, and the world even your own family may mock and scoff at you because of your faithfulness, the Lord hears you and keeps you safe. He is the one who has endured the assaults, mocking, beatings, persecution, and death at the hands of sinful men. He is the one whom the Father forsook on the cross because of your sin and the sin of the world so that he never forsakes you. This is what Christ has done and now why you are exalted and will be at that seat of honor for all eternity.

What joy to hear those words of Jesus today, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” He has humbled us and we turn from our sin. Trusting in him through faith as we receive his means of grace we have all that he has done. You are the Lord’s exalted and honored guests now and forever.

The antiphon for today says, “Righteous are you, O Lord, and right are your just decrees. Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes.” Looking to God in humility is looking to God as one who cries out, “Lord, have mercy.” Humbling yourself is turning from your sin and looking to Christ for your righteousness. In your God given faith you know where your redemption is found, it’s found in Christ for God has indeed dealt with you according to his steadfast love.

The Lord who healed this man in the Gospel reading is the same Lord who came down from heaven and did perfectly fulfill all of God’s law as he alone is righteous. He is the one in whom is found no deceit yet was led as a lamb to slaughter to suffer in the place of the unrighteous. He is the upon whom God’s righteous anger is poured out and satisfied it by the shedding of his blood. He humbled himself and was obedient unto death, even death upon the cross. He is the one who died and is raised. This Lord is your Lord, whose name is the “Lord is our righteousness. Jesus

is your Lord who humbled himself so that you are exalted and baptized into his exalted name which is above every name.

Baptized into Christ you are clothed with him and his righteousness. No longer does God count your sin against you but sees only the righteousness of Jesus. That's quite something as you ponder and take all of this to heart today. In your sin you are nothing but in Christ you are and have everything. Your sin is forgiven, and you have eternal life. Your righteousness, then, is a real righteousness that avails before God, it's the righteousness of faith which clings solely to Christ.

In humility hear the Lord's word and seek him. Cast your sin and care upon him and he won't let you fall. He's called you and as you sit here today waiting for his return you sit as those who know a word is coming. The day is drawing near when Jesus will say to you, "'Friend move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you." That's what you have as his people called out by name by the Holy Spirit and gathered around his holy word and sacraments. His promise is yours and you fix your eyes on Christ crucified and risen as your hope. Your faith is founded on Jesus Christ your God and Lord. You sit in humility now but a humility that has a future glory beyond compare. You are exalted in Christ now and you will be exalted unto life everlasting. You are unmoved as you stand on his sure word. He promises you a place of honor at the eternal wedding banquet on that day on that final day when all sin, suffering, and death comes to end. He comes to call you to that place even as he has called you now to the feast of his Supper and you walk by faith hearing his word. The day is coming, though, when your faith will come to an end and you will walk alongside him face to face and with all of God's saints, his called people, forever.

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