

Rise Up!  
15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; Series C  
Luke 14:1-14

Every weekday at noon the professor broke the rules and everybody smiled. Well, at least all of the students smiled and respected him for it. Most of his colleagues were probably indifferent. Some perhaps disapproved. At lunchtime Monday through Friday there was one particular professor at my Alma Mater, Concordia Seminary, who walked into the cafeteria with his brown paper bag lunch where all of the students ate. Each day he sat down at a different table and among different students. Once seated he tore open his brown paper sack and ate his meal, engaging the students in conversation between bites. He wasn't exactly breaking the rules but he was breaking with the traditional social custom. Typically, the professors ate with their peers in the faculty lounge. If certain faculty members did eat in the student cafeteria the tendency was for them to eat together at their own table. They took a seat with those of the same relative status.

Now, I don't presume to know the motives of the professors. I don't think, however, that they were trying to give the impression that they were better, more erudite, or more distinguished. It is probably more likely that they were drawn to sit together since these colleagues shared many of the same interests and had much in common. We do the same in our social settings, don't we? We like to gather with other "like-minded individuals." The phrase "birds of a feather flock together" comes to mind. This is probably why many of you enjoy being around one another here at Atonement. We are a people that have something in common. We come together each Sunday to do something in common. We all gather in the Divine Service to receive the same eternal gifts of life, forgiveness, and salvation from the same, one, true God. And so it was with all of these professors of mine, with the exception of one. Every weekday at noon this professor routinely put himself in a lower place and all took notice. When this professor was asked why he did this he replied, "I am a student too!"

I bring this story before you this morning because it illustrates well the point that Jesus seems to be trying to make in the Gospel reading. Jesus is one dinner guest among others for a meal in the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. Other religious leaders were present. They all seemed to be concerned foremost about following the social customs of the day when it came to meals. That is, they were concerned about status. They were preoccupied with where they ought to sit, desiring to take the most honorable, distinguished seats at the table. In comes Jesus and he just continues being, well, Jesus.

As God in the flesh Jesus acts according to God's values and not the values and customs of the culture. By the end of this meal, through his words and actions, Jesus overturns the common customs and social values when it came to dining with others. Specifically, Jesus seemed to be saying, "Do not relate to one another according to your relative status, but relate to one another according to the opinion of God. Begin first with your identity and status according to God and let that influence how you act at the dinner table." Beginning first with your identity and status according to God, you may find yourselves eating with people whom you never thought you would eat. You may find yourself extending invitations and showing generosity to those to whom you never thought of extending an invitation and showing generosity. In

other words, Jesus was trying to help them realize something that my professor always seemed to keep at the forefront of his mind, “I am a student too!”

It is our common tendency to relate to one another first and foremost according to our relative status, is it not? It is hard not to be concerned about our image and reputation before others. We live in an “image culture.” While browsing a newspaper online the other day, I saw an advertisement to the right hand corner of the screen that had this heading, “How to age gracefully.” This is one example of a concern primarily about image and appearance. Most of us were all teenagers once. Some of us will soon be teenagers. Middle school, junior high, and high school life is all about image, status, and appearance. Are you a jock or a band nerd? Are you gonna wear this style of clothing in order to fit in and be in style or not? Are you gonna behave the way everyone else is behaving or not? The sad truth is that we often don’t grow out of these questions and concerns. They often follow us into our adult life. They intrude our social circles even today.

The tendency to relate first and foremost according to our relative status, image, and appearance has an effect not only on us but also on others. You see, this tendency has an insatiable appetite. Once we start down this path of viewing our status, image, and appearance in comparison to the latest trends, fads, and socially acceptable behaviors, we will never be satisfied. We will never be content in our status, image, and appearance. We will never be secure in our identity.

But rather than “throw up the white flag” and cease this kind of status and image pursuit, we may often just chase it more and more, as we see in the example of those dinner guests in the Gospel reading. And the pursuit has a disastrous effect on others. We end up using them to get ahead and to maintain the desired status, image, or reputation. Or perhaps worse, we may neglect the other person and their needs. That was the case in the Gospel reading. The dinner guests were so concerned about image and status and doing the right thing according to the customs that they ignored a sick and ill man who was right in front of their eyes. A man who had a condition known as dropsy, which often resulted in the swelling of bodily limbs. Moreover, Jesus had to remind the dinner host at the end of the Gospel reading that, in addition to considering his friends and those of equal social status, he may also want to extend his generosity to include others like the crippled, the lame, the blind, those who are so often marginalized in societies.

When you begin first and foremost with your identity and status according to God, it often influences how you act at the dinner table and beyond. You may find yourself showing greater compassion and generosity. We may need to remind ourselves at times, “I am a student too!” As Christians, we may consider ourselves students of the Word of God and Will of God. Perhaps it would be even better to consider our identity first and foremost as children of God belonging to the household of God. Regardless, let us remember first and foremost that we are his and see how God shapes us to be his generous and compassionate children in relationship to others.

You and I have our identity as his children by virtue of the generosity and compassion of our God. He saw that you and the whole creation were in need. He saw the worst that Sin has done to your bodies and souls and the effects it has had on the whole creation. And he sought to raise all of it. He sought to restore it. He sought to bring what was dead and dying through the effects of Sin and disobedience to new, eternal, everlasting life. And so he sent a servant.

God sent the one who, though being in the form and image of God, did not count equality and status with God to be grasped (Phil 2:5-11). Out of great love for you and obedience to the Heavenly Father, Jesus of Nazareth disregarded his status as first in the Kingdom of God and he made himself last. In the fullness of time he humiliated himself to be born of the Virgin Mary, to suffer and die so that you might be forgiven and have the privileged place at the banquet table in the Kingdom of God. He humbled himself so that you can be exalted to his place. He altered your image, identity and status. Through his death he gave you life. And through his resurrection so too you rise up! In Christ God, the Father calls you to move higher and take your privileged seat in his Kingdom. As God's baptized child you have that status, image, and identity *now* even as you wait for that status, image, and identity to be fully revealed when Christ returns. *Now* you are washed and forgiven. And through the Spirit of God at work in you God is working mightily through you to meet the "body and soul" needs of others. He is working through you to show compassion and generosity even to those of a different status and background. It makes no difference in the opinion of God.

God has called you to a new identity in Christ so that he can give you new callings. We might call them assignments, vocations, or stations. They are the places in our lives where we where the masks of God and are used by him to meet the needs of others and share the compassion, generosity, and love of Christ. Each day we "rise up" remembering our new identity, image, and status as exalted children of the one who humbled himself for us. And understanding this first and foremost as our identity, it humbles us and God uses us in whatever role and station we have in relationship to others—mothers, fathers, children, neighbors, students, stay at home mom, dad, or grandparent—it makes no difference. What does matter to God is that there are people who have bodily and spiritual needs. He wants to use you where you are to meet them. He wants to use us together as a congregation to meet the needs of those around our Church. So by the grace of the one who rose for us, so that we could be exalted, let us rise up! Amen.