

Your Life in Christ Speaks Volumes

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

October 1, 2023

Luke 14:1–11

There is only one person who speaks in today's Gospel reading. But make no mistake, there is a lot said by everyone. Non-verbal communication can speak volumes. How we act can say more than speaking what we are thinking. When Jesus went into the home of one of the leading Pharisees, the religious leaders didn't need to say out loud what they thought of Him. He could tell by the way they were intently watching Him. They were waiting for Him to do something. To say something. Anything they could catch Him in to show that He really wasn't who He said He was.

It was a sabbath, and you are not supposed to do any work on the sabbath. There was a man there who had abnormal swelling in his body from fluid build-up. They were just waiting for Jesus to heal this man so that they could pounce on Him that He should not be doing work on the sabbath, the day of rest. Jesus was proactive, responding to their glares, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not?" He knows what they are thinking and He is going to heal this man anyway. He asks them if it is against the Third Commandment to heal on the sabbath. They are silent. But doesn't that speak volumes? What are they going to say to that? No, you should leave this man in his misery because this day is sacred. If they say that they are exposed for the hypocrites they are. But unfortunately for them, their silence equally exposes their hypocrisy.

This is in the face of the plea of this man who was suffering terribly. Luke doesn't record any of his words. And it may be that he didn't say anything. We know of other times where people pleaded to Jesus for mercy, crying out to Him for help. But you don't always need to use words for that. He was there in front of Jesus. Jesus could see the look of pain in his eyes. He could see in those eyes the pleading for relief.

This entire Gospel reading revolves around a miracle, Jesus healing this man of his wretched condition. And yet Luke's describing it is remarkably brief. Because that is not the main thing that is going on here. Jesus takes him, heals him, and sends him away. That's it. We certainly can imagine that the man poured out his emotion in gratitude. But for Luke, in this instance the focus is on something else. And that is what is going on with these religious leaders. They haven't said a word and yet how they are conducting themselves is speaking volumes. Jesus asks them another question. "Which one of you if your son or your ox falls into a well on the sabbath will not immediately reach in to pull him out?" Now how are they going to respond to that? They are left to stew in their anger.

But this is not even the end of their hypocrisy. Jesus has noticed another thing about them, something they have communicated clearly without ever saying a word. When they entered the house of this leading Pharisee they jockeyed and maneuvered for position. They each wanted to make sure they got the best seat they could. They needed to be seen by the others as important. Their thought was not coming in to enjoy the meal with their fellow religious leaders. It's quite stunning also that since it was the sabbath, the one holy day of the week, their thoughts were not

on holiness. They weren't thinking of their fellow religious leaders. Their actions spoke clearly that they thought of themselves first, they each thought of themselves as the most important person and that others should see it.

They haven't said a word, but He is once again going to speak. He tells them a parable. It takes off on the words from the book of Proverbs which we heard in today's Old Testament reading. If you are at a wedding, don't sit in a position of honor because a person who has a higher rank than you will be invited by the host to sit there and he will tell you to go sit in the back. Instead of being honored you will be humiliated. Instead, Jesus says, when you come in, sit in the back. Let the host come to you and say, "Friend, what are you doing way back here? Come up to the front." Then you will be honored in the presence of everyone. Jesus says that the one who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus is Lord but He exhibited humility in His life and in His ministry. In His life by leaving the glories of heaven and becoming flesh. In His ministry by not lording it over people but rather by serving them and being merciful to them. Paul expresses the humility of Jesus in his encouragement to the Philippian Christians: "Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when He had come as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross."

Jesus is Lord and yet in coming to save us He is the very essence of humility. He healed this man, but that is just one thing. Relief from physical pain and illness is a wonderful blessing, and it's no wonder we pray for that in our need. But it is still temporary. Jesus would heal many more people. All of the people He healed and blessed in other ways culminates in exhibiting humility that we cannot begin to fathom. He would humble Himself by giving His life over into death for every single person. Those religious leaders were caught up in their own importance. They were filled up with themselves. They exalted themselves. But He who is forever exalted as the Lord God poured out Himself for everyone.

Christ has paid for our sins and so we are free. We are freed up to see the Ten Commandments for what they fully are, not as restrictions on what we should do so that we can be seen as obedient and good people. In Christ we see the commandments as God's will that we carry out for the good of others. Paul has a great way of showing this in the Epistle reading, how the way we live speaks far more than really our words ever could: "Walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

The actions of those religious leaders showed that they were all about themselves. Jesus shows it should be the opposite. What this means for you is easy enough to see. Humble yourself. Be joyful in what is good for others and in helping them in their need. But actually doing this? Well, that's not so easy. Why is that? One reason is that you have your own needs. You also have your

own expectations and wants. When you are consumed with all these things about yourself it is selfishness. You are not thinking first of others but yourself. Humble yourself

But do not look to yourself to try to be humble. You should be looking to Christ. You cannot live in this humble, selfless way by your own ability or even by wanting to. You can only live this way because you are in Christ. You are baptized, you are in Christ. In the Lord's Supper you take into yourself His very body and blood and so He is in you. You are in Christ and He is in you and so you can delight in seeing others in the way He sees them. He loves them. He forgives them. He gives to them. All the people in your life is God giving you the opportunity to love them in the same way. Humble yourself. He has exalted you so that you may rejoice in serving others. Amen.

SDG

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