

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church  
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 17, 2013  
Luke 14:1-11<sup>i</sup>

Part I

Two or three generations ago in more rural communities, families attended church in the morning. After church they often would go over to the relatives for Sunday dinner. It was a time to get some rest and relaxation after having heard the word. At the relative's place cousins played together in the farmyard. Aunts pitched in to clean up after the meal. Uncles chewed the fat on the porch.

Today that particular lifestyle has gone by the wayside, more or less. Even so, the Sunday dinner is still enjoyed, but in a little different way. After hearing the word, it is a custom for some to go out for dinner with family or friends. Maybe you have that custom. At the restaurant, hosts, waiters and cooks all work together to take care of your dinner appetite.

That is what was happening in our text. Jesus was invited over for dinner after the morning service. The invitation was given by a prominent Pharisee. Jesus was one of a number of dinner guests.

At this particular dinner there was something unexpected. A stranger appeared at the dinner. He was a man who had an infirmity, dropsy. As he stood before Jesus, the host and dinner guest watched Jesus' every move. They did because underneath their courtesies, they were lying in wait. They were hoping that Jesus would trip up and break the Sabbath.

To be sure, God had set aside the Sabbath in the Old Testament. The people could not work on that day. Six days they could be burdened with work, but the seventh day was to be a day of rest. On a deeper level, it was a day set aside to hear God's word. God's word gave them rest from *another* burden, the burden of sin.

Over the course of time, rabbis built traditions around the Sabbath. They added hundreds of categories of work to avoid. They are categories *not* found in God's word. Those categories included things like arranging flowers in vases, sharpening pencils, taking a spoiled grape out of a bunch of grapes, cleaning dried mud off your shoes, braiding hair.<sup>ii</sup>

These extra categories might have had a good intention in the beginning; a good intention to help train about the meaning of the Sabbath, but something

happened. These man-made rules had the effect of putting the emphasis on what *man* did to get rest. It turned what was *meant* to be rest into a work; instead of *God* serving them, *they* were serving God.

We may wonder, "How could they turn the Sabbath upside down like this?" We may wonder, but the truth is, our flesh is really no different. For instance, when we gather to hear God's word, it is called, *Divine* Worship. That means *God* serves us. He serves us in word and sacrament. Yet, it is our nature to want to flip that around.

That is, there is this idea around that worship is not about what God does for me, but what I do for God; not about getting rest from my sins, but how to improve my lot in life; not about God at work in baptism and communion, but about my dedication to God. It's not about God serving me, but about me serving God. Someone described man's serving God as the "heart of worship." He put it this way, "True worship happens when you *give yourself completely* to God. What matters is that *you* do it."<sup>iii</sup>

What that does is puts the *burden* on us. You have enough of that during the week, don't you? It begins with your commute. You have to fight traffic to and from work. Work places put more and more demands on the employees. You do more for the same pay. Technology increases the stress. You've got dozens of e-mails to keep up on. Smart phones take your work with you wherever you go. Add to that your daily chores to do at home. You've got meals to prepare; laundry to do; and, bills to pay.

So now our flesh is going to *add* to that burden on our day of rest. It does by saying worship is about what *I* do for God. That's taking the burden of the law and putting the monkey on *our* back. It does by saying I can meet God half way, *if* I give my best; I can improve my lot in life, *if* I pray hard enough; I can be by best self, *if* I put my mind to did. It's *my* service to God. To be sure, that's trying to shoulder the burden of the law.

## Part II

So, the thing meant to give rest – worship - is turned into a work. The flesh is not content to be served by; to be waited on by; to be given rest from sin by God. No, our flesh *insists* on being host, waiter, cook and guest all rolled up in one. Imagine if you tried to do that at a restaurant. They might just tell you to take a hike. Or imagine trying to do that in your aunt's kitchen a few generations ago. She might've run you out.

That's the very point Jesus makes with the parable he told at the dinner. He said it would be like being invited to a wedding feast. Imagine a certain guest gets there early. He is early enough so that he has his pick of seats. He sees a seat at the head table. He decides he want to be at that head table. After all, he feels

that he has shown more dedication to; and done more for; been a better associate to the host *than* the other guests.

Such arrogant pride tempts the host. The host sees right through it. So he demotes the proud to the lowest place. He does it in the presence of the other guests that have arrived. With shame, then, the proud guest is humbled before all the others.

After telling this parable, Jesus makes this application. "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled." The point is this; if we think that worship is about *us* doing something for God, about *us* serving God, about *us* doing the law, we think *too much* of ourselves. It is nothing else but self-righteous pride. It arrogantly sets itself at the head of the table with God. So, it is better to be shown our sin of pride; to be crushed by the law; to be humbled by it now; it is better that happen now, than later in hell. Then, there is no getting out.

### Part III

Let's return to the scene at the dinner Jesus was invited to for a moment. While at the dinner, Jesus saw a man that was hurting. It was the infirm man with dropsy. Dropsy is an infirmity in which the body retains water and limbs swell to abnormal sizes.

Now Jesus knew that the host and his guests were watching his every move. He did, so he asked, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" The host and his dinner guests kept quiet. So, Jesus answered his own question. He healed the man.

After he did, he challenged them to compare his actions with what they themselves would do. "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" To put it another way, "Is it lawful to *show mercy* on the Sabbath?" They were speechless. They were, because they *knew* Jesus was right.

It was, in fact, at the heart of the Sabbath. It was about showing mercy. It was about giving rest from sin; God doing something for sinners; God serving man.

To put it another way, the Sabbath was all about Jesus; Jesus, giving rest. It is what he came for. Listen to Jesus himself say it, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*."<sup>iv</sup>

Jesus gives you rest because he took the burden of the law off your shoulders. That is, Jesus served you, meeting God every step the way; was his best self at doing that, having no blemish of sin; gave himself completely to his Father's hands, surrendering every fiber of his being. Day in and day out Jesus met the burden that you can't meet. Jesus did. Jesus kept it in your place; and because he did, he took the burden off you; and you have rest from the law.

Not only that, but Jesus also took the sin of your pride; the sin of thinking too much of yourself; of exalting yourself before God. He took the sin under which you labor week in and week out – worry about making ends meet; keeping score of hurt feelings; grumbling about how bad you have it. Jesus lifted those crushing burdens from your shoulders. He shouldered them for you on the cross; and you have rest from your sin.

It didn't end with Jesus death, though. It didn't because "He who humbles himself will be exalted." Jesus humbled himself by taking your sin. He died in your place. Then, his Father exalted him. He raised him from the dead. He did because Jesus left your burden of sin, buried in the grave; gone for good.

#### Part IV

The Day of Rest, then, *is* all about Jesus serving you in his word; about what God does for you; about God giving you rest from sin – not the other way around.

To be sure, after God gives us rest from the burden of the law and sin, there is a *response* of faith. Faith responds by thanking God with our gifts; by singing his praises; by serving one another in our vocations. We do so during the work week. That week, though, tires us out from work; and from sin we commit there. We feel its burden week after week.

That is why we need the rest God gives; it's what God does for us here. It is as we gather around his word and sacrament. His word and sacrament is the feast he has prepared *for* our rest. Here he invites you to wine and dine. Here *he* comes as host, cook, and waiter all rolled up in one.

When he comes as your host, he does the unexpected. It is the unexpected because we are unworthy sinners. You and I are worthy only to be sent to the lowest seats; only to be humbled in hell. Yet, he moves you up to the head of the table. He sits you down with him to eat and drink in his kingdom.

Now, today, he gives you that feast in a very special way. He invites you to his Supper. He sits you at his table. He wines you on his blood. He dines you on his body. By means of them the burden of your sin is lifted. He, who was humbled for you, exalts you, the sinner. He does by sitting you at the table with him! He does by waiting on you hand and foot.

No wonder we call it *Divine* Worship. *God* serves you. *God* does something for you. *God* gives you rest from sin. Rested, you are refreshed by Jesus. You are here in time and will be hereafter in eternity. Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> References to the text (NKJV) will not be cited in the sermon

<sup>ii</sup> [myjewishlearning.com/shabbatsworkprohibition](http://myjewishlearning.com/shabbatsworkprohibition)

<sup>iii</sup> *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren, Zondervan, 2002, p. 78, emphasis added

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 11.28