

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church  
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 2, 2013

Luke 14:16-24<sup>i</sup>

### Part I

If you think back to your school days, English may not have been your favorite subject. Perhaps another subject was your favorite. It might have been math; maybe science; or maybe it was art class. Be that as it may, you still needed to know English. Maybe you didn't like to learn it in a class, yet you learned it by using it.

As you and I speak English, we use, what are called in English, pronouns. If you remember, pronouns are short little words. They are used in the place of a noun, like someone's name. Instead of saying that name all of the time, a pronoun is used; he, she; him, her; we, us; they, them. It is a lot easier saying, "they did so and so," than saying, "Frank, Dorothy, Bobby, Helen and Henry did so and so."

Standing alone, though, pronouns are anonymous. That is, we don't know *to whom* they are referring. If we don't know, we are in the dark. In the dark the sense of what we are saying is lost. If the sense is lost, what good does it do?

So, why all of this talk about pronouns? Our lesson begins with two of them. "Then *he* said to *him*." "He" is

Jesus, but who is “him?” That’s the stand alone pronoun we need to identify. “Him” is a dinner guest. He is a dinner guest at the house of a prominent Pharisee. He is one among many other dinner guests present, including Jesus.

During the dinner, Jesus makes an observation. The guests had all scrambled for the best seats. Each one wanted to buddy up with the host. After all, he was a man of wealth and influence. He was rich not poor; a winner, not a loser; a saint, not a sinner. By clawing their way to be close to him, they might just get ahead, too.

Now Jesus, in a rather tactful way, addressed their rude and arrogant dinner behavior. When he did it made an impression on one of the guests. That dinner guest responded, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!<sup>ii</sup>” This it the one to whom the pronoun “him” refers.

## Part II

So Jesus takes the opportunity to speak the parable of the Great Supper to him, the dinner guest. It is as though Jesus lifts it right out of the dinner occasion he is at. In the parable a host also prepares a dinner, called a Great Supper. He paid for this mouthwatering feast out of his own pocket. Once the dinner is prepared, he sends a servant to invite the guests.

In this case, the invited don't come. One uses his newly bought property as an excuse. Another uses his newly bought business equipment, oxen, as an excuse. Still another uses family, his new wife, as an excuse. Whatever it was, they let other things come *between* the invitation and the attending.

Of course, a parable is an earthly story with a spiritual meaning. In the story, then, God is the host. He has prepared the feast of salvation. It was paid for in full at no charge to the guests. The price paid was the blood of his dear Son. Then, God sent out his invitation by means of gospel preaching. "Come one; come all; sinners ruined by the fall..."

...but the Pharisees of Jesus' day made excuses. They did because they didn't like it that Jesus invited sinners to the feast of salvation. They didn't like sitting down with losers; with the poor; with sinners. They just wanted to sit down with the rich; with the winners; with the saints. They were people who looked good in the eyes of others.

Looking good in the eyes of others is nothing new. The good anyone does, dresses up lives. It gives the one doing good works a nice appearance. They are works like doing good to someone you know is hurting – a coworker or classmate; volunteering in the community – at your child's school or at a benefit; helping a neighbor in need; taking care of your family; doing your best at work; being a good friend and a good listener. These are

the kinds of good works God would have us be doing in our lives.

The thing is, our sinful self wants to take *pride* in these outward works. It wants to feel that we have something deserving; that we, with our works, have spun the clothing we need; that we have the outward appearance needed to sit down at God's Great Supper. After all, we don't live life in the gutter like that other guy.

What does Scripture have to say about that, though? "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."<sup>iii</sup> Just think of what the picture of filthy rags conveys. The picture is one of rags soiled by body fluids. As a result, the rags are sweaty, grimy, smelly, offensive, etc. Such filthy rags don't draw you to them. Not at all! They are so repulsive we have to hold them at arm's length. That's what God says our righteousnesses are like. They are soiled by sin; filthy; good for nothing.

How can that be, you wonder? How can good done, be good for nothing? It means that even the good we do is done with the wrong motives. For one, we don't always do good for purely *unselfish* reasons. We often do good *to get* something in return. "God owes me one." For another, we don't always do good from a *willing* heart. We often do good because we feel we *have to*. "God will punish me, if I don't."

...and even if our motives *were* pure, the very fabric of our nature is soiled. It is, because it is cut from the

same cloth as Adam. When he fell, his nature became soiled and filthy with sin. Not only did his nature become soiled, ours did also with him. It did, because he could only pass on down to us a sinful nature.

In short, we are dressed in filthy stinking rags; good for nothing; good only to be tossed into the dump heap of hell. No wonder Jesus speaks the words he does at the end. "None of those men who were invited shall taste my supper." **The dinner guest, dressed in his own works, excludes himself.**

### Part III

These are Jesus' words to the dinner guest referred to as "him." Not only are they spoken to him, but also to any anonymous "him" who feels he is rich with his own righteous dress. That includes us. Jesus, though, doesn't leave "him" nor the "him" in us there. Let's get back to the parable to see how.

### Part IV

After hearing the excuses of the invited, the servant reported to the host. The host, being angry, turned to those in the streets. He told the servant to "bring in the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind." They were those who could give nothing in return. They were beggars.

If you have ever traveled in the world, you have seen such poor beggars. Many countries do not have

Social Security and Welfare to take care of their poor. So you can be walking down a crowded city street and there they are. They are sitting on the sidewalk among all the pedestrians. They are dressed in torn, dirty rags. Some are blind. It is obvious they are. Others have a leg or two missing. It is plain as the day. There is no mistaking it. They can't work. They can't support themselves. They are completely dependent upon the passersby. So they have a cup in hand, and basket on the ground, an empty outstretched hand. People give them a coin or two here and there.

That's how sinners are before God. In Jesus' day they were the social outcasts; the tax collectors, the harlots, public sinners. The Pharisees excluded the likes of these sinners. They cut them off. They were made to feel their shame and unworthiness. It happened that some of these poor sinners felt crushed by God's law; felt shame and guilt before him. They knew their poverty; that they had nothing in their hands to bring before God. They knew they were dressed in filthy rags before him. They were beggars before God.

Martin Luther understood what it meant to be such a beggar. He said so; on a note. The note was found on a slip of paper. It was lying on a table next to his bed. He wrote the note the day before he died. It said, "We are beggars. That is true.<sup>iv</sup>" Luther knew that he was in his last moments. He faced eternity. He had nothing in his

hands to bring. He had no righteous clothing of his own. When it came to his own works, he was empty handed.

So are you and I; we are empty handed. We have nothing in our hands we can bring before God that he should owe us in return. We are beggars; everyone.

It is to us unworthy beggars that God the Spirit extends the gospel invitation. "Come one, come all; sinners ruined by the fall. The feast has been paid for in full. It costs you nothing. It cost Jesus his blood. He shed his blood for you on the cross."

...and with that gospel invitation, the Spirit puts the cross in your empty hand. The blood from that cross flows down onto you and covers you. It is on you for the forgiveness of all your sins. Your sins are remembered no more. With that Gospel invitation, the Spirit wraps you up in the clothing you need. It is the robe that Jesus wove for you. He wove it by living a perfect life in your place. Wrapped up in it, you have the righteousness you need. It is not your soiled righteousness. It is Jesus' unspotted righteousness.

God did that very thing for Miles, here at the font, today. Miles, like each one of us, came into this world, a poor sinner. He had no robe of his own that he could weave and stand before God. He had nothing in his hand he could bring. He didn't because like each one of us, he was cut from Adam's soiled and filthy cloth.

Yet, here in these waters, the Spirit extended the gospel invitation to Miles. With that gospel invitation,

the Spirit put the cross in Miles' empty hands and covered him in Jesus' atoning blood. He wrapped him in the robe of righteousness that Jesus wove for him. He did, for "all of you who have been baptized have been clothed in Christ."<sup>v</sup> To be sure, God did that not only for Miles, but for each one of you in your baptisms.

So, we are beggars. We are beggars at the end of life, at the beginning of life, and in the middle of life. "We are beggars. That is true." Nothing says that so well as here at the communion railing. Here we come and kneel before him in body and heart if we can; in heart if we can't in body. We do because we are empty-handed; we are beggars. Yet, here, the Spirit fills your empty hand with Jesus. He gives you all that Jesus is. He feasts you on Jesus' body and blood. The blood of Jesus takes away your sin. He wraps you in Jesus' righteousness. All your shame is covered. **You, the beggar, are richly dressed in Jesus' righteousness to sit down at God's feast of salvation. Amen!**

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

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 14.15

<sup>iii</sup> Isaiah 64.6

<sup>iv</sup> *Luther's Works, Vol. 54, American Edition*, Fortress Press, p. 476

<sup>v</sup> Galatians 3.27