

Trinity 17

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Jesus words reach much deeper than mere instructions for table etiquette.

It's not about where to sit when you are invited to dinner.

Rather, His is a timeless teaching is about humility.

Humble yourself — do not **take** honor or authority for yourself but wait in lowly and powerless state until honor and authority is **given** you.

It is not wrong to be in the position of honor or authority — in fact Jesus promises that those who humble themselves will be put there!

What is wrong is **to take** that position for yourself — usurp authority.

Authority is always and only given — it is never rightly taken.

Those who exalt **themselves** — those who take honor — will be humbled.

But those who humble themselves — waiting for honor to be given them from above — will be exalted in due time.

This timeless teaching is true at every level of God's economy:

It is true, first of all, in the way that God has ordained that society works.

People who climb to the top by their own ambition...

Who have a hunger and greed for power, authority and the honor that goes with it, will always eventually be brought down low.

We see examples of this happen every day to remind us of Jesus' teaching.

Prominent figures in the Church, in the nation and in the world are publicly humiliated — some are brought low in death.

In either case, God's economy is always vindicated: *“he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.”*

But on the other hand, people with humble and dutiful character — those who seek simply to do their duty quietly and to the best of their ability — will always be elevated to greater and greater honor and responsibility.

Like Moses, born to be a leader, yet he tended sheep until he was eighty.

And David who, although he was anointed King by Samuel, humbly served Saul in his court for many years before being elevated.

This is not only the economy of the temporal world, it is also true in eternal things — that is, in the way that salvation works.

Those who claim the honors of heaven for themselves — those who seek to get them by their own works are always brought to the depths of hell.

But those who confess that they are worthless sinners and cry to God for help are exalted to the highest heavens.

Salvation is given — never taken — and it is given to those who humble themselves before God in true faith.

Note well, though, that this godly humility is not simply shown forth with quiet words and a head held low.

Rather, humility before God means primarily letting him tell you what to do.

Sometimes that means to listen to and obey those whom God has sent.

Other times, it means to command and lead others even when you don't want to.

Either way, whether leading or following, it is humility to do so as God commands.

When you do not do so but rather do it your own way, you are exalting yourself over and against God -- even if your rebellion takes the form of humility.

This is the sin of pride and for this sin you deserve, according to Jesus, to be cast down to “the lowest place” which is, of course, hell.

In this Jesus not only teaches what is demanded of you but He also does it Himself.

In fact, it is the very nature of Jesus to humble Himself and become subject to people and things that by nature have no authority over Him.

This He does not do arbitrarily out of false humility.

Rather He does so only and always at the command of His Father.

When Jesus was 12 years old, he did remind His parents that He was the Son of God who *“must be about My Father's business”* but He obeyed them anyway.

When He first appeared as teacher in the Synagogue, He did not begin to teach until He was asked to read and teach from the prophet Isaiah.

When He stood before Pilate in judgment, He didn't defy His authority but said, *“you would have no authority but that My Father gave it to you.”*

And even on the cross, Jesus who was not naturally subject to death nevertheless subjected Himself because of the Father's will.

As Paul says: *“He humbled himself and became obedient unto death.”*

As a result of this, *“God highly exalted him and gave him a name”* and honor.

He who subjected Himself to His death and was laid low in the grave has now been raised up to the highest heaven.

There He has been given power over death.

But this power He does not use for His own gain.

Rather, even now He subjects Himself to the Father's will.

And it is the Father's will that Jesus' power over death and the powers of hell be used to free you from their tyranny.

And so this Man of humility who has been raised up by God is sent to you today to preach the Kingdom of God — and by this preaching to both humble your wicked pride and to raise you up to heavenly places with Him.

Jesus who was the guest in the home of the Pharisees now comes to you as the host of His own feast.

And to this feast He does not invite anyone who can pay Him back.

No one is invited who is not first completely abased and wholly unworthy to be here — who confesses that you have nothing to give that Jesus needs.

He invites you who are poor, crippled, lame and blind --

He invites you who have nothing to call your own, who know your own limits and that you can neither see the kingdom of heaven or travel there of your own. and having invited you to this feast, here He blesses you beyond belief.

Here, as host He girds Himself and serves you with His own Body and Blood.

This meal was bought with the unfathomable price of His own suffering and death and it is given to you as a free gift.

And by this free invitation, you who are humbled in faith and obedience to God are already now exalted and lifted up to the highest heights of heaven.

Today Jesus comes to you to say, *“Friend, move up to a better place and sit with Me in My kingdom.”*

Take the place of honor that I have earned for Myself but now I give to you.

You who stand humble before Jesus now are exalted to live with Him in eternity.

AMEN.

