Have you ever noticed the things some people will do to get noticed? Some are really obnoxious and they get noticed for the wrong reasons. Look at advertising today. Commercials, billboards, and magazine ads make you believe that if you have their product, you will surely stand out in the crowd. Being noticed and being the best is a part of our American culture. We are taught to believe that we deserve anything we want and that we are better than others. I have heard it said: If i could buy a man for what he is worth and sell him for what he thinks he is worth, I would make a fortune. With an attitude that believes we are better than others and always fighting to be noticed, we can neglect certain relationships. In doing so, we fall flat on our face and become disgraced among our peers.

Today, Jesus tells us a parable about pride and disgrace and humility and grace. He warns that pride certainly leads to the fall and encourages us Christians to live humbly because we’re honored by him.

During this time in Jesus’ ministry, the Pharisees amped up their opposition against him. These Pharisees were trying to make their own gospel - one based on their own works and not the redemption of Christ. Because of this, Jesus told many parables to explain scriptural truths and to show people how Christians live. The parable he uses in text is about being invited to a wedding feast.

We are told Jesus was invited to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee. This invitation was more an attempt to trip Jesus up than a generous gesture. We read that Jesus was being carefully watched. These Pharisees were already showing their lack of humility, thinking they were better than Jesus - that they knew more than him. There was no evidence of penitence for their sinful pride. Their prideful acts were obvious to Jesus. He noticed how they picked the places of honor. This was not unusual for the Pharisees. In another place, Jesus said: They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues. Clearly it was most important for the Pharisees to be seen as great in the eyes of mankind.

So Jesus told a short parable about going to a wedding feast. Those who heard Jesus understood what he was talking about. They had been to many wedding feasts. At these feasts there were often places of honor, reserved for certain guests. To assume that you could sit in one of these places of honor, would be to presume yourself to be more important and better than all the other people who were invited.

The guests with Jesus understood the humiliation he was talking about. To be asked to leave a seat and move to a lesser seat, especially the least important place would be humiliating. To assume a seat of honor is to miss the point. The point is that it is an honor to even be at the feast. So to be removed from the higher seat reveals pride and shames that guest.

It is only natural for everyone to want to be first. This is pretty easy to notice. Just watch people around you like Jesus did. People run to be first in line for food. Others cheat to be first on the athletic field or to be the first in class for that scholarship. Others cut peers down to get a promotion. And then there are contests like America Idol or America’s Got Talent. If you watch the first few episodes you will see many people who think they deserve to win it all, when obviously they are no good.

In Jesus’ parable, he wanted to show that people who consider themselves first think themselves to be without any flaw. They believe they deserve the best. To assume that you do
not have any flaws is to miss the obvious. So Jesus encourages humility. He is not speaking about discretion or good manners here. Rather, he is rebuking the sinful pride found in the Pharisees and in us. When we read of Jesus telling a parable about a banquet or a feast we know he is often referring to the kingdom of heaven, the heavenly feast. But of course, no one deserves this heavenly feast. Since no one deserves this, Christ tells us that a Christian lives humbly.

No, we certainly do not deserve an eternity at the heavenly feast. There is so much sinful pride manifest in our lives. There is that materialistic attitude - we place worth in things. We think we are better than others simply because we have more things. It is also too easy to point to those who do this and take pride in ourselves for not doing so. Or maybe we take too much pride in something else. I go to church every Sunday. I put quite a bit in the offering plate. I volunteer more than the person over there - I really ought to be recognized for that. I am more humble than that person is. Sinful pride like this is anything but humble repentance. When we think we are the best, we are telling ourselves and God that we have not done wrong - we do not need any forgiveness from him.

And when we exalt ourselves, we place ourselves above our neighbor. We boast of our own merit and worth before God. Everyone who does this will be humbled and excluded from the kingdom of God. What a sham that we think ourselves to be great, to be deserving. We think we are deserving when the one who had no pride and no sin humbled himself even lower than us, lowly sinners. He is the one who deserved no punishment, the one the Bible says **humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!** If we want to take the seat we think we deserve, think again. You know what place we deserve? We deserve to take our place on the cross. We deserve to sit in the eternal fires of hell. We deserve to be punished, to be cursed by God!

But Christ showed the ultimate humility when he took our sinful pride to the cross. The sinless Son of God took our seat, our place. He went to the cross, where we should be. He suffered the agony there for our sins. He experienced hell, where we deserve to be. He was punished and cursed by God. He did this all for us. Christ humbled himself so that we would be included in the kingdom of heaven. We are included, not because of our own works, but because of our Savior’s.

So, knowing that our sins should nail us to the cross and drag us to hell, we fall to our knees before our Father, asking for his forgiveness. Christ’s humility drives us to repentance, to plead for forgiveness. Rather than taking the seat of honor, we humble ourselves before God; we know we deserve nothing. Christ’s loving humility then causes us to cry out in rejoicing. His love for us overpowers us and motivates us to follow him humbly, to live a humble Christian life.

A humble Christian always has on his/her mind the forgiveness of sins, given to us by Christ’s love. With that in a Christian’s heart, a Christian can live a humble life in many ways. We recognize that nothing is ours. We know that our time, talents and treasures are God’s, so we humbly dedicate and devote them to God and his work. We know that Christ is our helper in all we do. We humbly offer help to those in need as we follow Christ’s example. Christ placed himself below us to save us. Because of this, we humbly place ourselves below others. We no longer boast of our own merit, but humbly we boast of nothing other than Christ. As Christians, we live humbly.

Yes, having sinful pride will certainly lead to the fall, if not here on earth, surely it will in eternity. So Jesus continued his parable by explaining to the guests how they should live so as not to be disgraced. Clearly, to take the **lowest place** shows humility. It shows humility which doesn’t assume to be the primary person present at the feast. Jesus clarified how humility will cause the humble guest to be **honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.** And he
finishes with a familiar statement: **Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.** That is something the Pharisees did not want to hear. They wanted to be seen and recognized as important. It was too hard to sit there and wait for someone else to exalt them; they wanted to do it themselves.

Of course, an attitude like that does not reflect what Jesus was talking about here. He was referring to a true humility - not a false humility that humbles himself just for the sake of being exalted later. Jesus referred to humbling oneself at other times. Recall when he talked about the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. It is not just true among each other that we will be exalted for humbling themselves; it is also true of God. James writes: **God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.** So when a Christian lives humbly, he/she is certainly honored as a true child of God.

True humility is a matter of the heart and not the action. Often our sinful flesh leads us to pretend to be humble, hoping for recognition or reward. Although we may be acting humbly, our impenitence still shows. God knows that we have self-serving motives in our heart. We cannot hide hypocritical humility from God. The Psalmist writes: **O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.** Such hypocritical humility is condemned by God. In our first lesson we hear this warning: **Do not exalt yourself.**

No, we Christians live with a Christ-like humility – one that expects nothing. Such humility shows the true nature of a Christian. It displays repentance. It knows it own unworthiness. It also knows its own faith, which glories only in the cross of Christ. It finds comfort only in Christ’s mercy. But humility does not give us God’s grace. It approaches God knowing that we have nothing but Christ crucified. Like the hymn says: **Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling.**

Although we live humbly, we know we are truly honored. We are honored to be children of God. What greater honor on earth is there than to have our Lord Jesus as our help and strength? What greater honor is there than to have his promise that we will live eternally with him in heaven? What greater honor is there than to have the blessing of repentance and Christ’s forgiveness in our lives? What greater honor is there than to know that our ranking among peers does not matter because our true glory is in Christ? We are supremely blessed. There is no higher place than to be a child of God. And God promises that we are exalted to that place because of Jesus and the humility he showed on the cross.

We are not only humble to those around us, but more importantly to God. When we humble ourselves before God, we are displaying a repentant heart that seeks his forgiveness and understands we cannot truly come to him without our Savior Jesus Christ. God blesses and honors us. Because of Jesus, he forgives our sins and places us into his kingdom, the highest place of all. So as Christians, we live with a humble heart, because we know our God is honored us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill