

“Where charity and love prevail There God is ever found; brought here together by Christ’s love by love are we thus bound.” When we think of charity, we may think of a charitable cause such as a local food bank or homeless shelter. In the church, the word charity is much deeper. Charity is summarized in two great commandments that Jesus outlines in His conversation with a Jewish lawyer, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”** Charity is love for God and love for the neighbor.

What does this look like? Jesus in this lesson gives us a primer on Christian charity through three different vignettes in the first fourteen verses of Luke 14. Let’s tackle them one at a time. 3. Where charity and love prevail, souls supersede statutes (v, 1–6). Jesus is invited to a ruler of the Pharisees and he heals a man with dropsy. It is a form of edema which involved the buildup of fluid in the body which causes swelling. It causes disfigurement and someone with dropsy would be considered unclean to the Jewish people.

At this dinner party Jesus did two things that were considered wrong. First, He interacted with, likely touched, an unclean man. Second, He did work on the Sabbath. But Jesus proves that souls supersede statutes. In order to love your neighbor as yourself, sometimes laws need to be bent or broken for the sake of showing charity to others.

Earlier Jesus condemned the pharisees saying, **“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love [or charity] of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”** The Pharisees were experts at majoring in the minors and used the law as an excuse to be cold toward others.

God’s law is a tool to help us see what true charity is; it isn’t a roadblock. If we keep on using rules and regulations as excuses to inaction and self-centeredness, we need to re-examine our hearts and test our motivations.

“Brought here together by Christ’s love by love are we thus bound. With grateful joy and holy fear his charity we learn; let us with heart and mind and soul now love Him in return.” Where charity and love prevail, souls supersede statutes. We ultimately see true charity in what Christ has done for us.

God could have been a stickler for the rules and left us hell bound because of our persistent rebellion against him. That would be just. That would be following all the statues of the law God has laid out. **“but God shows his [charity] for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** He sent Jesus because if any of you had a son or a truck sinking into the Mississippi, you wouldn’t hesitate to pull it out no matter what day of the week it was. Jesus came to save you. Jesus then invites you to a banquet just like the one at which Jesus healed that man. He invites us into His true Sabbath rest.

Jesus then tells us a parable about charity. 2. Where charity and love prevail, celebrities select servants' seats (v. 7–11). “Forgive we now each other’s faults as we our faults confess, and let us love each other well in Christian holiness. Let strife among us be unknown; let all contention cease; be God’s the glory that we seek; Be ours His holy peace.”

Whether you’re planning a seating chart at a wedding reception or watching an awards ceremony, seating matters. The bride and groom get seated at the table of honor. **“Now [Jesus] told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor.”** Jesus noticed this in the crowd of people and used this as an opportunity to teach humility and charity.

Perhaps not many of us are wringing our hands over where we get to sit, although this could be an opportunity to say a joke about our preferred spots in the pew. But we may experience this when we are put into scenarios that are beneath us. Have you ever said, “I shouldn’t have to...?”

I shouldn’t have to take out the trash. I shouldn’t have to care for mom. I shouldn’t have to get stuck behind a tractor on the county highway. I shouldn’t have to follow silly rules, after all, pastor just said sometimes laws could be broken!

But where charity and love prevail, celebrities select servants' seats. As Christians, nothing is below us and nobody is below our consideration. Loving God with our whole heart and loving our neighbor as ourself means taking the lower seat at the banquet to give someone else an opportunity to shine.

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” We see this spelled out as the Apostle Paul shows us what true charity is. He writes in Philippians 2: **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”**

Jesus was a celebrity who took on a servants’ seat. His entire life’s story is demonstrated in this parable of the banquet. He took the low seat becoming a humble human for you. He took the low seat as He endured suffering, pain, and death on the cross. Yet He was exalted as He rose again and ascended to Heaven as He sits at the right hand of God.

This humiliation and exaltation story has called countless Christians to lives of charity. Think of the countless men who left respected and high-salaried professions to become pastors. Think of the men and women who decline promotions or leave the workforce to better care for their families. Think of Christian philanthropists who start charities such as crisis pregnancy centers, hospitals, and orphanages. Christ’s attitude of humility inspires us to act likewise, even if in small ways.

Lastly, 1. Where charity and love prevail, saints summon sinners (v. 12–14). “Let us recall that in our midst dwells Christ, His only Son; as members of His body joined we are in Him made one. For love excludes no race or clan that names the Savior’s name; His family embraces all whose Father is the same.”

We all know table etiquette. If you’re invited to a party, you don’t criticize the hosts’ guest list. “Why didn’t Cindy get invited?” Yet this seems to be what Jesus is doing here. That hardly seems to be the picture of Christian charity.

Yet this all ties back into the bigger picture of charity being love for God and love for neighbor. We are those calculating people. When we give gifts at a wedding or Christmas, it isn’t a selfless gift. Wedding attendees get a free meal and a night of entertainment. The people you give gifts to are the ones giving gifts back to you. The world lives by the phrase, “If you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.”

But the way of charity that Jesus shows us is that the man with dropsy from earlier in our text should have been at the place of honor rather than whatever high-ranking Pharisee was there instead. “**The poor, the crippled, the lame, [and] the blind**” are the all-stars in Jesus’ kingdom.

Where charity and love prevail, saints summon sinners, the rich associate with the poor, the popular invite the outcasts. What a joy it is to see this in the Christ’s Church. Although we are not perfect, the Church is one place where the rich commune with the poor, the healthy care for the sick, and we welcome people of every culture.

Some in our society may consider the Church hateful, bigoted, and exclusive. Jesus’ exhortation in today’s text as well as the witness of Scripture tells us that the Church of God is one characterized by diversity, inclusion, and equality. The Church is from every tribe, language, and nation. Jesus invited the outcast and sinners to eat with Him. The Church welcomes both men and women, rich and poor to be transformed by Christ’s love.

Of course, this doesn’t mean we accept and condone sinful behaviors. Sex is reserved for marriage. Marriage is between one man and one woman. Gender is fixed: either male or female. After all, Jesus Himself said, “**But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’**” But as Christians, let us not shrink away from befriending those who may not be like us. Let us invite to our dinner tables those who may have other beliefs. Let us show kindness to those who hate us and speak ill of us.

Where charity and love prevail, saints summon sinners. We see this charity and love prevail in Jesus our Lord who said, “**I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**” We are those who have been called into God’s abundance grace, forgiveness, and peace. As that charity of God grows in us

through the Word and Sacrament transforming our lives, we can gladly invite those who cannot repay us.

BECAUSE JESUS IS GOD'S CHARITY AND LOVE, SERVICE PREVAILS AMONG CHRISTIANS. These three accounts in Luke 14 call us to ditch the scorecard and follow Jesus in a life of radical love and charity for others. Because Jesus loves you, you are free to serve others rather than serve rules. Because Jesus loves you, you can take the lowest seat knowing you'll be exalted, not in this life, but in the one to come. Because Jesus loves you, you can invite all sorts of people along for the ride, even if they don't have their acts together.