

August 31, 2025 – Luke 14:1-14

My wife, Stefani, hates having people watch her while she cooks. She says it makes her feel like she's on a cooking show. Because she feels like she's being scrutinized. Judged for every choice she makes. Like we're standing there, ready to suggest something different at every turn. And the truth is, she's a very good cook. If you leave her alone, she will undoubtedly prepare something wonderful. But if you hover and watch her closely, it doesn't matter how skilled she is, it feels more like a test than a meal.

You probably know that feeling, don't you? When someone is watching us closely, we assume they're looking for mistakes. We assume they're waiting to criticize, waiting to catch us doing something wrong. Nobody likes having someone watching over your shoulder. It makes us uneasy.

That's exactly the scene in Luke 14 today. One Sabbath, Jesus goes to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, and Luke tells us, "*they were watching [Jesus] carefully.*" They weren't there to enjoy fellowship with Him. They weren't hoping to be fed by His word or blessed by His presence. They were watching with suspicion. Watching with judgment. Watching for Him to commit a sin.

These men weren't curious observers. They were suspicious critics. They wanted to catch Jesus in the act. Maybe violating Sabbath, maybe washing improperly, maybe breaking one of the billion little rules and traditions that they had created over the years. Jesus was a great rabbi. A great teacher. But they weren't there to learn. They were there to accuse.

And there, in front of Jesus, is a man suffering from dropsy. Dropsy, if you're not familiar with the term, is a painful condition of swelling caused by fluid buildup. Even today, dropsy can be difficult to treat. Back then, it was impossible. And they didn't even have Tylenol to relieve the pain. This man was doomed to suffer for the rest of his life.

But did the Pharisees care about him? No. Most likely, they put him there as bait in their trap. They watched to see: Will Jesus heal him on the Sabbath? Will he do work on the day of rest? Will he break the Third Commandment, according to their interpretation of it? Who cares that there's a man in pain here. They only care about condemning Jesus.

Now, we can shake our heads at the foolishness and cruelty of the Pharisees, but let's be honest... we enjoy doing similar things, don't we? There's an entire industry of gossip magazines and social media outlets, obsessed with digging up dirt on famous people. And we do it just as much in our daily lives. We scrutinize the activities of those around us. We watch to compare, to criticize, to feel better about ourselves. We watch the successes of others with envy, and their failures with a certain satisfaction.

Yes, the eyes of sin are suspicious eyes. But here's where it gets interesting. Because, with this sinful, condemning mindset, more interested in catching someone in the act than helping someone in pain, we might assume that God is doing the same thing. That if He is watching us closely, then it must be for condemnation.

And in a sense, there is a nugget of truth in that. God is watching. He sees everything. Proverbs 15 reminds us, "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.*" Nothing is hidden from His sight. He sees not only what we do, but what we think, what we desire, what we love. He sees our pride, our envy, our condemnation. He sees the sinfulness of our hearts. And he does indeed condemn it.

But, to quote Martin Luther, that's actually the alien work of God. That's what he does because, as a good Father, he must. He must reign in the sinfulness of his creation and judge that which is sinful. But it is not his character to do that. And Jesus reveals that to us in the parable he tells.

Jesus notices how the guests at the dinner were choosing the places of honor. Jostling for the best seat, elbowing for recognition. And he reminds them of a piece of wisdom that Solomon tells us in our Old Testament Lesson today: don't put yourself in the place of honor, or you might be humiliated when the host tells you to move down. Instead, take the lowest seat, so that the host may say, "*Friend, move up higher.*"

Because that's exactly how God operates. In God's eyes, "*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" God sees how much we crave approval, how often we seek the spotlight, how subtly we position ourselves to get the best seat in life. Maybe not at a banquet table, but in our careers, our families, our communities, even our congregations. We want to be seen, respected, and praised.

But before God, all our pride collapses. His law strips us bare. His eyes see us for what we are: sinners, puffed up with pride, swollen with self-importance, but in reality poor, crippled, lame, and blind. Suffering a disease far worse than dropsy.

And that's a terrifying thought. If God is watching closely, then He sees the sin I try to hide. He sees the heart that no one else can see. And His judgment is true. But here's what Jesus wants us to know: God's watchful eye is not only in judgment. It is also in mercy.

Remember that man with dropsy, planted in front of Jesus like a trap? Jesus sees him. But He doesn't see bait. He sees a man in need. He asks the lawyers and Pharisees, *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"* They remain silent. And so Jesus takes the man, heals him, and sends him away.

The eye of Jesus is compassion. Where the Pharisees watch to accuse, Jesus watches to heal. Where they see an opportunity to trap, He sees an opportunity to restore. To show compassion. To fulfill the law of love to your neighbor.

That is the proper work of God. The work he loves to do more than anything else. God sees your suffering. He sees your weakness. He sees the weight of sin pressing on your soul. And instead of turning away, He acts. Instead of condemning you, He sends His Son to bear your sickness, to carry your sins, to take the lowest seat of all: the cross.

Think of it: Jesus took the lowest place. Born in a stable, laid in a manger. Misunderstood, rejected, betrayed. And finally, nailed to a cross between criminals, abandoned even by His friends. On that cross, the eyes of the world saw failure. The Pharisees saw victory over their enemy. But the eyes of God saw the greatest act of mercy the world has ever known.

As Paul writes in Philippians 2: *"He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him."* The One who took the lowest place has been lifted to the highest, so that all who trust in Him are lifted with Him.

So what does Jesus teach us? *"When you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place."* That's not just social advice for banquets. That's the way of His Kingdom.

To take the lowest place is to confess your sin, to admit your unworthiness, to stop claiming honor for yourself. It is to kneel before the cross and say, "I have nothing to give you in exchange for your goodness." And then to hear Christ say, "Friend, move up higher."

So what does this mean for daily life? First, it means freedom. You don't have to live in fear of God's watchful eye. Yes, He sees you. But in Christ, what He sees is forgiven. Covered. Washed. Made righteous. His eye is that of mercy. His gaze is that of love.

Second, it means generosity. Jesus says: *"When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you."* In other words, live as God has dealt with you. He invited you when you had nothing to give. He welcomed you when you were unworthy. He carries you to the highest seat, the place of honor, even as a tiny baby, like little Eileen this morning.

So go and do likewise. Show mercy without calculating repayment. Serve without expecting recognition. Love without demanding return.

Third, it means hope. *"You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."* The repayment is not now. It is not in the praise of men. It is not in earthly reward. It is in the resurrection, when Christ calls you to the eternal feast, when every lowly one is lifted up, when every tear is wiped away.

God truly sees everything. Yes, He sees your pride and sin. But more importantly, He sees you covered in the blood of Jesus Christ, healed, forgiven, honored. He sees His beloved child, called to the feast.

So live humbly. Live freely. Live under His watchful eye, not with fear, but with joy. For the One who sees you is the same One who says: "Friend, move up higher." Amen.