

"Watching the Watcher"

Text: Luke 14:1, 7-14

My prayer for each of you is simply that God would bless you richly with his grace, for if you have God's grace – the undeserved love of your Creator God – you will lack nothing. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Sinful human beings that we are, we have a dangerous habit of trivializing conduct that in reality is anything but trivial. Usually the hard part is trying to figure out when our ideas of "harmless" come from the old Adam in us (and are therefore false and dangerous) and when our thoughts and actions truly are harmless. Some examples might help. Maybe you know someone who "likes to go to bars." Is there anything inherently sinful with that? Depends, doesn't it? While bars are inherently dangerous places, we have to admit that it is possible to patronize such a place without sinning. Better questions would include: "Is it wise?" and "Is it beneficial?" and "Would my Savior encourage or discourage something like that?" Each individual has to evaluate his own actions, and to do that correctly requires both honesty and humility. You have to be honest because our tendency will always be to justify what we enjoy. You have to be humble to subject your thoughts and desires to God's.

Feeling a little self-righteous because you, personally, are not at all tempted by bars? How about something like watching movies? The same parameters and considerations apply, but the decisions we make there are even more difficult because of the general lack of stigma among Christians. In other words, it's not uncommon for Christians to proclaim that they "would never frequent bars," but you almost never hear the same about watching movies – even though both can be sources of obvious temptations. Even very similar temptations.

The solution, again, is to honestly and humbly evaluate and reevaluate all of our actions and desires. The fact that we "enjoy" something just makes it all that much harder to evaluate it honestly and objectively.

This morning we will examine yet another popular (and seemingly harmless) pastime: people watching. Do you like that sort of thing? Most do. Anything wrong with that? Surprisingly enough, there can be – a fact brought to light in our text for this morning. The text that will guide us in our study this morning is found in Luke's Gospel, the 14th Chapter:

ESV **Luke 14:1, 7-14** *One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ⁷ ¶ Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸ "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, ⁹ and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." ¹² ¶ He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

These are God's Words. To the Author of these words we address this simple prayer: "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

So there can be danger in people watching? Huh. How so? Our text for this morning includes some remarkable irony. Did you catch it? The first verse of our text said that the Pharisees were carefully watching Jesus, and the second verse tells us that Jesus was also watching them. To put it another way (which brings to light the irony) the watchers were watching the watcher. Both were, in other words, people watching, but both were doing so for very different reasons. One was doing so to harm. The other was doing so to help.

If you had to sum up the general theme or topic of our text, I'm guessing you wouldn't say, "people watching." Most would say "sinful pride," and they'd be right. Sinful pride is a soul killer, because it is a *faith* killer. In fact the case can be made that pride and greed are the root of nearly every other sin, and it is sin that destroys saving faith. There are dozens of passages that tell us what God thinks of sinful pride, but just one from the Old and one from the New Testament will tell us all we need to know: In Proverbs 6:16-17 God

the Holy Spirit identifies **"six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him."** The very first thing he identifies as an abomination to him is **"haughty (prideful) eyes."** In 1 Peter 5:5 we read, **"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"** As Christians we would certainly all agree that just hearing that God *hates* and *opposes* sinful human pride establishes the fact that we want nothing to do with it.

If we are to do battle against sinful pride, we first need to identify exactly what it is. In other words, what is it *exactly* that God does not want to see in us? Is sinful pride an attitude, an action, or both? The danger here is that we define the thing too broadly or too narrowly – condemning what is not wrong or justifying what is. The *sin* of pride always involves elevation of self. It starts with a feeling - a belief - that you are better or superior. That's an attitude that no human being can ever truly hide, at least not for long. It always reveals itself in words and actions, sometimes subtly, sometimes obviously. The fact that you, in your own mind, believe yourself better or superior makes it right that you be noticed and praised. If others do not do so, you must do the elevating yourself. The fact that you believe yourself to be better means that you deserve special privileges. It means that rules don't apply to you, that you shouldn't have to wait for others or do what others have to do. Sinful pride shows itself when others are receiving praise, for it always compels you to step from the shadows and to share the spotlight, even to the point of crowding the other out. Sinful pride says, **"Look at me. Notice me. Praise me. I'm special. I'm better."** It is, in the end, a manifestation of man's natural idolatry. It is worship of self.

Sometimes it's easier to really come to understand one thing by defining its opposite, thereby identifying what it is not. The opposite of sinful pride is, of course, humility. Humility is that heart attitude that seeks to elevate others, beginning with God himself. It recognizes gifts in self, but it praises the Giver of those gifts, not the recipient, and it seeks to deflect all glory and praise accordingly. Do you think your opinions are right? Of course, or they wouldn't be your opinions. Yet God's Word asks, **"What do you have that you have not been given?"** Because humility recognizes the true Source of all good things, it always acknowledges the need to be filled, protected, and preserved by God alone.

Understand then that humility is not an *optional* character trait. Humility absolutely has to be the basic condition of the heart. If it is lacking, something else – something very bad – will take its place, and the

alternative is always sinful pride. Pride will always occupy any and every space that is devoid of humility. Know too that sinful pride and godly humility are opposites, and as such they just don't get along. At all. Ever. Pride cannot tolerate humility and humility cannot tolerate pride. That's why humility is not a luxury for the child of God. It is an absolute necessity, for if your heart is not humble, it will most certainly be steeped in sinful pride – and we were just reminded that God *hates* sinful pride. More to the point this morning – and worse still – pride hates Jesus Christ.

Which brings us to the irony mentioned earlier in our text, and the seemingly innocuous pastime we call "people watching." Again, both the Pharisees and Jesus were watching each other, but for very different reasons. Steeped in sinful pride, the Pharisees hated Jesus – as they hated anyone and everyone who told them that they could not earn their way into heaven by their own goodness. They watched Jesus with condescension, hatred, and arrogance. Their goal was not to learn but to find fault and to destroy. They watched him not to learn truth, but to gain confirmation of their preconceived notions, both about him and about themselves.

Does any of this ring a bell? This is exactly how sinful pride turns something like people watching into something not at all innocent or inconsequential. It's one thing to watch others because you find it interesting. It's something else altogether when we do so in prideful condescension, condemnation, and arrogance. Satan is the undisputed master when it comes to tainting the innocent. His secret ingredient is sinful pride. He ought to know. He once existed as a holy angel of God, but threw that all away by the introduction of pride. No longer content to serve God, he believed himself worthy to be God's equal.

Jesus was not addressing social graces in our text; he was addressing sinful pride. Maybe you've been in a situation like the one described here by Jesus, or some other instance of public humiliation. While the shame in being publicly asked to move to a lower position is rather acute, the point we need to establish is that *humility isn't just practiced to avoid being shamed before man*. The avoidance of shame is just a happy byproduct of humility, and humility is a heart condition that comes with simple honesty.

Using Jesus' parable/picture, a man who would choose the lower seat (all the while intending to be called up to the higher) knows nothing of true humility. He is a conniver and schemer – a fake who

pridefully manipulates others for his own self-glorification. Jesus demonstrates this general truth in the second part of our text, where he talks about inviting those who could never repay your invitation. Note that there is nothing in it for the man who invites **"the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind."** The man who invites the "have nots" doesn't do so to be paid back. Again, the point is that true humility does not act with ulterior motives. A humble human being acts in accord with his convictions, never with a view toward *"what's in it for me."* So also in Jesus' parable he isn't talking about subtle manipulation. He is, again, talking about the heart. The humble heart truly believes *"I deserve no more and no better."* Pride is the thing that tells you that you deserve whatever you believe you deserve.

With hearts then filled with pride, hatred, and cunning, the Pharisees were watching Jesus. But Jesus was also watching them – with a perfect heart filled with humility and love. Of course he loathed the sin he saw, but his inviting arms were always extended toward the sinner – even those who hated him. He did not want to destroy the Pharisees; he wanted them to repent, believe, and be saved. Such things are never accomplished by pretending that sin isn't sin, by justifying sin, or by pretending that sin doesn't exist. It is sheer nonsense to imagine that Jesus didn't condemn sin. He did. What he did *not* come to do was to bring condemnation upon the sinner, for it was sinners he came to save. Sinners like you and me, who seem to find it so hard to rid our hearts of the very evil we loathe.

Finally, don't miss the bigger picture here. Jesus wasn't giving lessons on social etiquette; he was teaching us something about eternal life – and here is where we gain the clearest picture of just how dangerous sinful pride truly is. Assume the banquet in our text represents heaven, and the Banquet Master (the **"one who invited you"**) is God himself. While it would certainly be awkward and embarrassing to be assigned a lower seat in a public setting here in time, how infinitely, unimaginably worse it would be to be singled out by God himself on Judgment Day and told, *"You don't belong here."*

What role does sinful pride play in that worst of all scenarios? The prideful heart has two reactions to Jesus and the salvation that he offers. Both are damning. The first is that I don't need Jesus and the perfection that he supplies *since I'm good enough all on my own.* The second is to imagine that I am somehow *deserving* of what Jesus has done, or that he *owed* it to me simply because I believe I am deserving.

Obviously nothing could be further from the truth – and true humility recognizes and eagerly accepts that fact. The truly humble heart freely admits that it does not deserve anything from God but justice, and justice calls for condemnation because of my sin. The humble heart rightly assumes its place in hell, and then is absolutely shocked and thrilled when our Lord says to us, *"Friend, you are at the wrong table. Your sins have been forgiven. You are perfect by my grace through faith. You are therefore my child and my heir – an important, treasured guest. Move up to the table of Life."*

Add this then to your daily prayer list – that God the Holy Spirit would first *identify* to you, and then drive from your heart, all sinful pride. Ask him daily to fill you instead with the Godly humility that recognizes your natural need and helplessness, how that need has been supplied by Jesus Christ, and therefore how good, right, and obvious it is to give all credit, praise and glory to him alone. Keep your focus on Jesus - watch the Watcher - but do so in humble, faithful awe. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV Proverbs 25:2-10 It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. ³ As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable. ⁴ Take away the dross from the silver, and the smith has material for a vessel; ⁵ take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness. ⁶ Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, ⁷ for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble. What your eyes have seen ⁸ do not hastily bring into court, for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor puts you to shame? ⁹ Argue your case with your neighbor himself, and do not reveal another's secret, ¹⁰ lest he who hears you bring shame upon you, and your ill repute have no end.

ESV Hebrews 13:1-8 Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. ⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" ⁷ ¶ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 12th Sunday after Pentecost – September 1, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 129 (Red Hymnal)

"Hail! Thou Source of Every Blessing"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Proverbs 25:2-10) Our first lesson from the Book of Proverbs is a companion to our sermon text. Some have accused Jesus of plagiarizing Solomon's thoughts and words, and presenting them as though they were his own. The fact is everything in the Bible is God's word, which means, among other things, that Solomon's words were given to him by the same God who spoke them almost 1000 years later. In fact Solomon's words certainly include Jesus as the ultimate example of a king who is surrounded by wicked men intent on impeding his work.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 33) (Read Responsively)

The Second Lesson: (Hebrews 13:1-8) Together with other practical advice, our second lesson concludes by reaffirming the perfect consistency of our Savior God. Jesus' unwavering humility is certainly an element of that perfect consistency. How remarkable that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was completely devoid of all pride and arrogance. His mission was faithful service to his Father, and the humble rescue of sinners - including you and me. God grant us that same spirit of humble, faithful, consistent service.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 23 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Hallelujah! Let Praises Ring!"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 12:49-53 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Watching the Watcher"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post Sermon Hymn – 777 (Brown Hymnal)

"Amazing Grace"

The Installation of the 2019-2020 Sunday School Teachers

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 23 (Stanza 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Hallelujah! Let Praises Ring!"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
Friday	-6:00 p.m.	– September Time Out
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour

CLC News – Pastor Timothy Daub has accepted the call to serve as vacancy pastor of Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich, effective September 29. Bethel of Morris has called Pastor Frank Gantt. Pastor Michael Wilke is considering the call to Prince of Peace of Loveland.

September Time Out – This month's Time Out is scheduled for this Friday, September 6. The adults are invited to the Fettig residence after opening devotions at the church at 6pm.

Daily Rest – The latest edition of the CLC devotional Daily Rest has arrived. If you are a subscriber you will find your copy in your mailbox. If you would like to subscribe, or if you are a subscriber and did not receive your copy (copies), please speak to Pastor Roehl.

Confirmation Class – Confirmation parents and students please note that Confirmation Class is scheduled to begin this Wednesday, September 4th, at 6pm. Since Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend out-of-town meetings on the 11th and 18th, Midweek Bible Class is scheduled to begin on September 25th.

Return to Regular Service Schedule – Next Sunday we return to our regular service schedule, with Sunday School and Bible Class at 9am and Worship Service at 10am.