

“We’re #1!” Luke 14:1,7-14
Pentecost 15 September 12, 2004 Pastor Jon Bergemann

Come, Holy Spirit, renew our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love! Amen. The Word of God for our consideration this morning is found in Luke chapter 14 (read text). In the name of Jesus, our humble and powerful God, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

Cheerleaders are an optimistic sort, aren't they? I mean, if you watch a sporting event on television, what's something the cheerleaders will do as soon as the camera catches them? Yes, that age old adage, "We're #1"!

And you'll notice that it doesn't matter if their team is down by thirty points and hasn't won a game in five years. What will they exclaim as the camera calls their name? "We're #1!!"

Sometimes it's amusing to see that kind of almost blind self-promotion. Now don't get me wrong, I know that the cheerleaders are coached to do that and it's part of their job. But to hear them exclaim "We're #1!" when at times it's very obvious that their team is anything but, is rather entertaining.

The Pharisees weren't cheerleaders for a team, and there weren't any television cameras around during Jesus' time, but they were quite accustomed to exclaim "We're #1" whenever they had the chance, as well. We see one of those situations in our text today. Jesus has been invited over to the house of a prominent Pharisee for a meal. Now if God were coming over to your house for dinner this afternoon, where would your attention be focused? Oh Him, right?! Well, not so in the case of these dinner guests.

As the meal is about to begin, Jesus notices how **“the guests picked the places of honor at the table.”** To visualize this, imagine a large, horseshoe-shaped table. At the head of the table, the middle of the "horseshoe", sat the host. The more "important" you were to the host, the closer to him and the center of the table you would sit. In this scene, the guests are jostling and jockeying for these positions of honor. They are eager to exclaim "I'm #1!" by where they are sitting at dinner.

And while the "We're #1!" cheer might be harmless enough to shout in support of a favorite team at a sporting event, Jesus recognized the danger of this cheer in one's spiritual life. These dinner guests were focused on themselves more than anyone else. They wanted their own glory. They wanted their own prestige. They wanted to be #1. This flies in the face of what God teaches us: that He is #1, that our purpose in life is to bring Him glory, that only He can do what is necessary to bring us to heaven. By nature God is #1, we aren't. These guests were shouting a dangerous cheer. Jesus sought to show them the truth.

So what does He do? He tells them a parable – an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. He describes a scene at a wedding reception where someone takes for himself a seat of honor, only to have the host of the wedding ask him to move to the back of the room. Imagine the humiliation! It's as if you were invited as a guest to a wedding reception, and you plopped yourself right down at the head table next to the groom, in the seat reserved for the best man. It would be a bit embarrassing when the Father of the Bride asked you to get up and find a spot at the back of the room, wouldn't it?

In effect, that's what these guests were doing at the feast in our lesson. Without thinking about others, they were racing for their own glory. They were so focused on gaining earthly honor, so eager to proclaim "I'm #1!", that they hadn't noticed the self-centered presumption that they were exhibiting.

Do we know that cheer? Do we seek to proclaim "I'm #1!" in selfish ways at times? We do. In fact, we are born with a sinful nature that knows that cheer very well and seeks to proclaim it in various ways.

Children often proclaim this cheer in rather straight-forward ways. "I've got Play-Station 2!" "Oh yeah? Well I've got the White Tigerzoid game and a rack full of DVDs!" "Yeah, well my Dad is going to get me a new laptop and we've got season tickets to the Redskins, Wizards and Capitals for a million years!" And so it goes. "We're #1!"

As we grow up, we learn a subtler form of the cheer. Instead of saying it outright to someone's face, we might just act in certain ways or say certain things that might not be the most sincere, but do help to make people like us more. We might want the most credit for the project at the meeting, so we make sure that we're noticed. We might want the attention and admiration of others, so we find ourselves talking about ourselves far more than listening to others. We might feel threatened by our successful associates, roommate, family members or spouse, so we don't mind joining in with a joke or a good laugh at them behind their back. "We're #1!"

But what really lies at the heart of such boasting? Why do we find it necessary to let others know how great we are, if indeed we are so great? Like the Wicked Queen asking, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" we want others to tell us how great we are because, at many times and in many ways, we might not really believe it ourselves. We know our weaknesses. We know our shortcomings. We know how fragile we can be and how often we can fail.

And so does God. Just as Jesus could see through the Pharisees' pomp, He can see right through our pride. He sees our ugliest sins and most awful failures. And He would have every right to tell us, who so often cheer "I'm #1!", the cold, hard truth. He would have every right to remove us from our self-appointed seats of honor and give us a seat in the suffering of hell for our sins.

But He had a cheer He wanted to share with us. He wanted to look us in the eye and proclaim in all truth, "You are #1!" So what did He do?

He, who truly was #1, who was God over all, came to this earth as a humble human being. He, true God, who could walk on the clouds, walked on the dusty roads of this earth. He, who could hold the earth in His hands, held the hands of children and blessed them. He, who could dry the waters of the oceans with His breath, dried the tears of sinful human beings with His bountiful blessings. Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life in our place. He was #1 in our place.

Then he sought out a position of ultimate humility. He sought out the cross and suffered the fires of hell in our place. He was the one person who could do this. Which led to what?

He proved that He was #1 by rising from the dead 3 days later. He proved that God sees His perfect life in our place. When God looks at you and me, He sees Jesus life in place of our sins. Which means what? We look like Jesus! We are #1 in God's sight!

Does that change if we lose our job or are transferred? No! Jesus lived, died and rose for us. We look perfect to God. We are #1 in His sight!

Does that change if we had a great first week of school or had the worst week of our lives? No! Jesus lived, died and rose for us. We look perfect to God. We are #1 in His sight!

Does that change if we make a ton of money or find ourselves begging for bread on the streets? No! Jesus lived, died and rose for us. We look perfect to God. We are #1 in His sight!

Does that change if others belittle us and berate us, if they insult us or enrage us? No! Jesus lived, died and rose for us. We look perfect to God. We are #1 in His sight!

Does that change if we get sick? If our bodies suffer? If we face death? No! Jesus lived, died and rose for us. We look perfect to God at the beginning, middle and end of our lives. We are #1 in His sight!

Which means what? Good news! You don't have to prove that you are #1! You don't need to win the admiration of others to know that you have a great worth. God gave His blood to show you how special you are. In fact, now you and I can have the joy of listening to others, of loving others, of living for others. We can have the joy of putting other's needs before our own. Why? Because Jesus has given us all we need. We don't have a worth to win, He won it for us.

In fact, one day we will leave the pride and arrogance of this dying world and enter upon the glory of the eternal world to come. We will be escorted by God into the perfect heaven He has prepared for us. With love in His voice and nail marks in His hands He will hold our

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hands and say, “Friend, come up here to me. Enjoy the heaven I have for you. You did nothing to earn or deserve this, but I did everything to make sure that you would have it. You are what I love more than anything else. My friend, my child, you are #1!” Amen.