

Liptálské slavnosti 2016

**The service at the Evangelical
Church of Czech Brethren**

Entering word

Song n. 161 (transl.: “We praise You God”)

Prayer:

Dear God in heaven, we want to thank You today for You helped us to wake up and gave us the opportunity to be here. Thank You that we can meet without any fear of being pursued, that You keep us from all evil, that You feed us daily and that You make us growing in love and friendship.

Thank You for all our guests as well and we ask You for us to be helpful to them in whatever way as needed. Thank You for festive moments like this one, for the opportunity to get to known new cultures, for the opportunity to see people from the other end of the world.

We ask You to deliver us all, including our guests, from evil, to give us perceptive heart and heart hearkening to Your Word. God, our heavenly Father, please, grant us Your mercy and show us our weaknesses so that we can submit them to You in faith that You will wipe all of them out from our hearts and help us to wake up to Your glory and joy. Please, let this service be heartening for all of us who gathered here. Be among us; and we know You are. Fill us with Your Spirit and please, give us the humility and love for others and, first of all, for You.

Amen.

Reading from the Bible: Ps 68,4–11:

But may the righteous be glad
and rejoice before God;
may they be happy and joyful.

Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before him—his name is the LORD.
A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,

is God in his holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

When you, God, went out before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,
the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain,
before God, the One of Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel.
You gave abundant showers, O God;
you refreshed your weary inheritance.
Your people settled in it,
and from your bounty, God, you provided for the poor.

Song n. 611 (transl. “There is not better in the world”)

Reading for preaching – Luke 14th chap., verses: 1.7–14:

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ... When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Preaching

Dear brothers and sisters,

Jesus was visiting a prominent Pharisee – a teacher and interpreter of the Law meeting another teacher and interpreter of the Law, to one of the highest Pharisees. Also here we have a lot of guests from all around the world, and we watch all of them in expectations what a beautiful performance we will see and hear.

But in Jesus' cause, it was a bit different. There was a large feast, for there were a lot of guests. It seems like this significant Pharisee "hauled Jesus over the coals" – it is not directly said, but it follows from the text: Pharisees waited and watched, "what folly will Jesus do again".

And so He did! Although we did not read it in the text (we skipped over it), Jesus immediately healed one man, who came to Him, with strongly bloated belly – he was suffering from dropsy. Even before this deed, Jesus provocatively asked the Pharisees, whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not. The Pharisees ordered people around or forbid things all the time. Jesus asked them whether it is allowed to do good on the Sabbath, when it is forbidden to work – and they are quiet. It seems like they would be afraid of each other. If they answered "yes", they would agree with Jesus, what probably was not very praiseworthy deed among local Pharisees. On the other hand, "no" was not the answer with which they could hundred percent agree. So, they were quiet. And Jesus healed him.

Then follows the text we have read. Pharisees watched what will Jesus do, what they could charge Him with. And Jesus noticed that while they seek sin in others (and especially in Jesus), they commit one themselves – they put themselves before others and they gave themselves airs. And pride is evil in the face of God. It reminds us a lot of the well-known words of Jesus: "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Luke 6,42)

Brothers and sisters, what did this text made me think of (and regrettably sometimes still does)? I asked myself who all should hear these words of Jesus. "Oh, Andrew should hear it! What a hard luck he is not here. Then would he know that he must take the plank

out of his eye, and then he will see clearly to remove the speck from eyes of others. Firstly should he change his behaviour... And Frank, hoho, if only he heard it..."

But this is absolute misunderstanding of this verse! As long, as I think of someone who all should "take the plank out of his eye", I do not know at all what this verse speaks about.

I am the one, who should hear it, no one else, just me. I really like the image I have once heard: "Whenever you point at someone with your finger in accusation, three other fingers point back at you."

Well then, the Pharisees (and other guests) sinned while searching for sin in others. But how did they sin?

They gave themselves on airs. Brothers and sisters, that is exactly the thing we often do when we have an unsolved problem: Firstly, we compare ourselves to other and see that we are losing, when we realise (and maybe no longer realize) some of our problems.

I would like to tell a short story about what happened to me. I had a friend, a scout, and we were with other scouts on a climbing trip. We found a rock and started to climb up, one by one. This friend of mine scolded others and laughed at them every time someone slowed down or stopped because of fear or hard stretch. It was really unpleasant. But what happened then? He started to climb and got stuck very quickly and not very high up. He was absolutely terrified and started to panic. We did not know, what to do with him, because he could not move up nor down...

The strange thing is that he could be silent and everything would be quite ok. It is normal that someone is afraid on the rock. But he scolded others a lot. Since then, I have seen a lot of similar situations.

When I cannot not stand up from the mud where I am lying, I look for a problem in others, to knock them even deeper than I am. And that is actually what the Pharisees did when they saw that they could not stand for the law, although they did all they could – at least, they acted as if they stood the law, so that they could motivate others by their appearance, if not by their real behaviour. And we often have the same tendency. We are down and instead of letting God through

Jesus Christ to pull us up we take others by hand, pull them down and try to climb up over them to be at least a bit higher.

But what says Jesus about these? “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 14,11) Jesus uses the same words four chapters later when he speaks about a proud “unsinful” Pharisee and a humble sinful tax collector.¹

Justified was the tax collector and not the Pharisee. After all, the Pharisee was the one who compared himself to others and said “thanks Lord I am not like this tax collector!” The tax collector was just able to say “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The Pharisee did not ask for forgiveness, neither he got one. The tax collector asked for it and therefore he received it.

In the English text we have read “Friend, *move up* to a better place.” In those times people normally lied on the ground or on something like bed while eating. Places for most important guest were “up” on the beds then, whereas the remaining places were on the ground. Many guests just wanted some comfort and to be a bit above others. Those who lied on comfortable elevated place are then seated down on the ground, while those who humbly lie down on the ground and leave higher places to other are then exalted and honoured by the host in front of others. Lord Jesus says what we should not do at weddings, but it is a parable, which means that it has a hidden meaning: the host presents the Lord – God, who will exalt us in heaven if we are humble on Earth.

¹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” *Luke 18,9–14*

Brothers and sisters, in the second part, Jesus speaks about doing good:

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Jesus does not forbid inviting our friends, He just does not recommend doing so for our own good. Neither does he say that we cannot let others invite us – He is invited to a feast after all. It is good to invite our friends for a lunch or to visit them, but million times more is to invite those who cannot repay us, who can give nothing back – then we have a reward in heaven. If we invite the poor, then we have a reward in heaven where it lasts forever, but if we invite the rich and those who can repay us, who can invite us back, the reward will last for one afternoon or so, until we digest the lunch we will have eaten at their home.

Let us think of those who have nothing – and especially of those who have no one, who are alone. Then we will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. The righteous are those who do not pull down others to the mud, but those who first, in their humiliation, weakness, and internal poverty, let themselves be pulled up from all darkness and sin by the love and salvation of Jesus Christ; and then, when they stand again on their feet, they can help others stand up and give them their bread and love.

Brothers and sisters, this is possible only in this order because as long as we do not let Jesus pull us up on our feet, we cannot walk, but only roll about. We can though give bread to others and do good deeds, but unless we say (like the tax collector) “God, have mercy on me, a sinner”, it cannot be paid for us by Jesus’ blood – which means that we can neither stand up ourselves, nor help others to stand.

Amen.

Song n. 672 (transl. “Give us wisdom, courage”)

Presentation of foreign groups (moderated by Ladislav Michálek)

Thanks and information for the church members

Prayer:

God Almighty, we bow down in front of You with thanks for these days we spend in the picturesque village of Liptál with nations from all around the world. We watch traditions of many people's generations and regions with respect, love and humility. The peace that accompanies us we perhaps even do not see, but it is not matter-of-course. People on this world hate each other, provoke wars, harvest suffering and death. Please, give us the strength to spread love, peace and well-being on Earth by all our work. Amen.

Lord's prayer

Final blessing

The LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

Amen