

Sermon for Proper 17C
Sunday, August 28, 2022
“Humility and Charity at God’s Party”

Text: Luke 14:1-15

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today’s gospel lesson, Jesus gives his disciples advice about pride, humility, and charity. In the story, Jesus has been invited to a dinner party on the Sabbath at the home of a leader of the Pharisees. Luke informs us that Jesus has been invited so that they could watch him. We know that Jesus and the Pharisees weren’t best friends. Something that we missed in the reading are the verses that were omitted from the lectionary that would have told us that as he arrived, Jesus met a man with dropsy, or severe swelling/edema. He asked the important guests at the dinner if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, but they didn’t answer so he went ahead and healed the man. The Pharisees were not happy. That particular sect of Judaism who called themselves Pharisees placed great importance on understanding and interpreting the scriptures, in this case, on how to apply the third commandment, “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.” The experts were stumped.

It turns out that those important folks, who wouldn’t answer Jesus whether it was OK to heal on the sabbath or not, were more interested in getting inside to get the best seats at the dinner than on helping someone in need right in front of them. Jesus recognized this and called them out.

I get it. I’ve gone to many dinner parties and banquets, and I’ll admit, I like being close to the food or being at a table with a low number, so I can be served early. Of course, any proper modern-day host of a dinner party would know to put place cards on the table, so the dinner guests would know exactly where to sit, but in the Roman province of Judea in the 1st Century AD, they didn’t use place cards and the best places at a high-society dinner were the ones where one could recline to eat. Well, Jesus decided to call them out on how they were more interested in the reclining seats at the dinner table than the well-being of someone possibly in medical distress. So, Jesus told a parable: “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host” and to avoid the embarrassment of being asked to move to a lower place. You see, being asked to move to a lower place would have been not only embarrassing to the person, but would also be seen as a demotion of a person’s status in the community. In other words, don’t let your pride entice you to take the best seats in the house, because you may find yourself in an embarrassing predicament. Rather, choose a spot that seems “beneath your station” and you’ll look more noble when the host invites you to a better seat.

But Jesus also gave them a bit of advice in charity: Next time, invite the homeless guy down the road, invite the crippled person begging in the marketplace, invite those

who are physically challenged, invite those people who have no voice in society. The social outcasts of Jesus's time were the people without honor in the community. They would have been the people nobody wanted to associate with perhaps because they were the result of somebody's sin—either their own or their parents'. That's what they believed. Society said, "you wouldn't want *those people* in your house. They aren't the 'right kind' of people to rub elbows with, much less invite to dinner!" But Jesus told them that the poor fellow standing outside the door is just as worthy of respect as the important dinner guests and deserves a good meal too.

In the eyes of God, everyone is equal. Social status doesn't matter, and dismissing those whom you think are beneath you in social standing is not appropriate either. We're all equal in the eyes of God, and because of that, we should be humble, not seeking after self-imposed gain or honor. He also taught that we should see the goodness of God in every other person, no matter what their life looks like, because they, too, are God's creation and deserve to be treated with love, because God does. If we do those two things—practice humility and honor toward all of God's creation—Jesus says we will be duly rewarded in the end.

Jesus offers advice about humility instead of pride and charity instead of indifference. Everyone deserves a chance to be at the high table and everyone deserves a little grace every now and again. When the world seeks after personal gain and honor, Jesus says that in God's kingdom, there is humility. When the world wants to box each other into defined categories of rank, honor, race, socioeconomic status, educational level, gender identity, sexuality, whatever, in God's kingdom all are equal and matter equally. And, when the world wants to push aside sinners, outcasts, those who don't quite measure up to the our modern high standards, God in his kingdom offers grace. Free grace. That thing that when don't deserve it, God gives it to us anyway. We, as part of the Body of Christ, get to live that out here at God's heavenly table when we share the Eucharist; then we are invited to live that out in our daily lives. At the end of the gospel lesson, one of the guests, who *did* get a reclining spot at the dinner, hit the nail on the head when he said, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

Wherever we find ourselves at the big table of life, we can be assured that God has invited all of us to his great banquet. He bestows his abundant grace upon us, and we in kind, should show that same kind of love and grace to each other. If we could all do that, if we could show some good table manners at God's table, the world would surely be a happier place. Amen.

Resource

"Commentary on Luke 14:1, 7-14," http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2957