

16th Sunday after Pentecost- EF 2015
Luke 14: 1-11

*Because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled:
and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

This is not the first time you have heard this. It's familiar. Many of us have heard this since our childhood: the value of humility.

Yet, when Jesus first spoke this to the Pharisees and lawyers, this would have been shocking. That was not a world that honored social mobility. In that culture one's honor was fulfilled by how one performed in the social position to which one was born. To fall below one's appointed station was to incur shame. To aspire to above one's station was presumptuous. The notion of being humble in this regard was considered absurd.

And yet, Jesus continually shocked those around him. These lawyers and Pharisees were watching Jesus because of his reputation of doing shocking things. Jesus had healed before on the Sabbath. This was an act of work. The Third Commandment prohibits work on the Sabbath. And yet, here they were all at this Pharisees' house, to share Sabbath and as luck would have it, there was a person with dropsy.

Now Scripture is silent about how and why this ailing person was at a private Sabbath gathering to which Jesus was invited. Are we to wonder that maybe Jesus was being set up, so that they could judge him, catch him violating the Commandments?

Well Jesus turned the table on them. He demonstrated God's true will and meaning of his Commandments. One does not honor the Sabbath, the day of the Lord, by turning away from one of God's children in need. To offer mercy and compassion to each other is to honor God. Jesus gave them the rubric by which they... and us... are to be judged.

And then Jesus gave them a parable about shame and honor, of finding one's proper position at the table, one's proper position in life. Don't claim the top spot, as you may be asked to step down, step aside. Assume the lower position, so that others will honor you and ask you to assume a higher position.

Well, that would make some sense to someone who was trying to strategize a way to get more. But of course, that wasn't Jesus' point. Jesus preached so that we could find a way to our true human nature, the nature for which we were created, the nature of being children of God, being made for the divine. Human nature is best understood when we understand divine nature.

Jesus' advice wasn't about how to get ahead. Jesus preached that right relationship with God involves right relationship with each other. This is made even clearer when we consider the verses that follow what we heard today:

And he said to him also that had invited him: When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren nor thy kinsmen nor thy neighbours who are rich; lest perhaps they also invite thee again, and a recompense be made to thee.

But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. And thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense: for recompense shall be made thee at the resurrection of the just.

With this clarification, our position at the table isn't something to jockey for. We are to position ourselves so that we are in loving relationship with each other. This inspires others, and so why wouldn't someone being shown caring respect ask for you to sit with them? Our additional lines of Scripture make it clear, that our place at the table is best determined by our desire to be of help to the person we are seated next to. Humility is when we show more care for the person next to us, than we do for how we are positioned for prestige.

Well, what do you think the odds are that these scheming Pharisees and lawyers got the point, that they changed their behavior that had been ingrained in them since childhood about so-called human honor? Hopefully their consciences were shocked into considering a new way of being.

What worries me even more is what are the odds that we shape our behavior. You see the statement isn't all that shocking to us. As a Christian culture over 2000 years old, we have practiced hearing the shocking statements and finding a way to nod in assent, without really ever shaping our behavior to match.

What do we do when someone in need is presented to us, when a caring and compassionate response would violate social convention? When we help others, is it with an eye of how we will benefit from it? If the favor is returned, two people benefit. If the favor is passed on and on and on, over time millions benefit and millions are in humble grateful relationship with each other. This is the type of relationship that continues into eternity, in *Thy Kingdom come, on Earth as it is in Heaven*.

What is our relationship with *the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind*? This not only means the real poor, those without the resources for food, health and lodging, but let's not forget them. It also means those presented to us, whose paths we cross, who are afflicted with sorrow, loneliness and despair.

Who are we to be? How are we to act?

Today, Jesus tells us and demonstrates for us:

We are to heal each other.

We are to rescue each other from the pit.

We are to position ourselves so that we can be in caring relationship with each other, that our loving action will inspire others to love.

We are to invite those in need to receive the love that we have received.

We can nod our heads in assent. We've been doing so for 2000 years, yet it may be still too foreign for us to do in deed. It is so foreign to our fallen nature, that it takes the grace of God to empower us. We need to ask for the grace to be open to that grace. It starts in prayer.

Pope Francis once said that just as we Catholics have memorized the Ten Commandments, so we are encouraged to memorize the Beatitudes. When we take the Beatitudes into prayer, they lead us to open our hearts, to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus... and care as he cares.

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Blessed are the meek

Blessed are they that mourn

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice

Blessed are the merciful

Blessed are the clean of heart

Blessed are the peacemakers

Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake

Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake

Pray with this. Come to Christ's table to become one with Him, one with his will, one with each other.

At bedtime prayer, when we spend some time in examination of our past day, may our humble position and the Beatitudes provide a lens of how we can more purely conform our lives to Christ.

When you find yourselves at the low end of the table, seeming to have been excluded or forgotten, look around. You may find Jesus sitting on your one side, and another sitting on your other side... who just may be in need of your caring love.