

Humility and Hospitality

Luke 14:1, 7-14

12th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C August 31, 2025

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Good morning, friends. Well, this Sunday is August 31, the last day of meteorological summer and with it, Nan's last day as your pastor. The "changing of the guard" is a prominent feature of the way The United Methodist Church works. We've all been here before as one pastor leaves and another comes on board. Still, you may have very mixed feelings about a change, especially at this time in the church year. Nan has been enriched by the pleasure of your company and will certainly miss each one of you. She prays that a new, healthy pastor will provide the kind of leadership that will enable the Choptank Charge to move forward, even as she continues to recover from this long and unusual illness.

Today's passage opens with Jesus enjoying fellowship and a meal with a variety of people. Here we see Jesus at the home of a Pharisee on the Sabbath. Luke tells us that Jesus has done this before (5:29-30; 10:38-42; 11:37). Chapter 14 verses 1-6 inform us that guests were closely watching Jesus. We can surely understand why. He certainly has been known to reinterpret the Sabbath, and what it means to work on the Sabbath. Today is no exception. He heals a man with dropsy, which is what we would call edema or fluid retention. We assume this healing does not go over well in the eyes of the guests, but, remarkably, Jesus is not sent away.

We learn in verse 7 that just as Jesus is being watched, so too he watches his dinner companions. What he sees is a U-shaped table with the guests reclining at the table. This would be a common place for men in the Greco-Roman world to gather and listen to a teacher. As people are entering the dining room of the Pharisee who is hosting this meal, Jesus notices that they are jockeying for position. Who will get the best seats, and where are these prized positions? We have to understand that the seats let everyone in the room know what the social standing of each person is. Remember that in this honor-shame culture, one would be humiliated by rushing for a coveted seat near the host only to be told to move to another seat of less prestige. Still, people do want the best, the most coveted, seats.

Seeing this commotion, Jesus takes the opportunity to teach the guests a lesson about humility (Luke 14:7-11) and then teach the host about what his guest list should look like (14:12-14). He begins by telling a parable, using a wedding banquet as a backdrop. He tells the guests to take the "lowest places" (14:9) when they arrive. That way, should the host want to honor them, they'd be asked to move to a higher position. As is often the case, Jesus did not just make up this notion, but rather, quoted from the Scriptures of his Jewish faith. In Proverbs 25:6-7, we find these similar instructions:

- 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. (end if quotation)

Humility is a virtue to be treasured by all people, not just Christians. Unfortunately, in our society, humility is often equated with “doormat.” We assume that if we humble ourselves, people will walk all over us. But that’s not what Jesus is talking about here. He’s talking about recognizing one’s dependence on God, about imitating the kind of sacrificial love that Jesus had for humanity, as he humbled himself and prepared to come to earth in the form of a human baby. We read in Philippians 2:

³Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. (end if quotation)

For Jesus, humility entailed obedience to God. He was not running after the best seat in the house, though as the Son of God he certainly would have been entitled to do so. Did he become a doormat? Absolutely not! Philippians 2:9-11 continues with these words:

⁹Therefore God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, ¹⁰so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (end of quotation)

Jesus is teaching in words at the home of a prominent Pharisee what he will later enact in his own life. He concludes his story with the words: “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted” (14:11).

We assume the guests understood Jesus, but then he moves on to teach the host a lesson, which we assume the lawyers and Pharisees, who are his guests, overhear. Understand that the host had acted according to the norms of the day. His actions would have met his guests’ expectations, but they were not in keeping with appropriate behavior in the kingdom of God. When you invited someone to dinner, it was assumed that this transaction would be reciprocated. Just as in our society today, most people who invite folks to dinner assume that they will get an invitation in the not-too-distant future, a

payback, if you will, for their hospitality. Jesus certainly subverts this generally accepted way things work. He told the host not to invite friends and family, or anyone else who could return the invitation. Instead, he was told to invite “the poor, the crippled, that lame, and the blind” (14:13).

“What?” we can almost hear the host saying. “I’m hosting a meal, hoping to do some networking here, trying to raise my own status, and be invited to the homes of other worthy citizens. Now, Jesus, you want me to round up the most marginalized members of society, the ones who can’t do anything for me. This is not how the system works.”

“Maybe not how the system of this world works,” Jesus would reply. “But if you do so,” ...“you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, but you will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous “(14:14) .

As has often happened, Jesus shows us the difference between living by the norms of this world, and living according the ways of the kingdom of God. There’s quite a difference! The problem seems to be that many of us want to live simultaneously in both worlds. Many people want the status, power, and money that can bring them fame in this world. Often, they press so hard to be recognized in this world that they forget about the kingdom that God sent Jesus to inaugurate here on earth.

What about us? What can we do now to fulfill Jesus’ command to invite those who are marginalized, those who are need?

Maybe we aren’t able to invite these folks into our homes. Actually, at the cost of food and other supplies, perhaps we ourselves aren’t able to afford to have a dinner party. But there are ways we can help those in need. Let’s take a look at two of them that our congregations are already doing.

The folks at Antioch have, for years, made a regular commitment to feed those in need of a meal. For some time, they have been offering a very complete meal (think: Thanksgiving Day dinner) to those who are staying at what is now known as the Dorchester Temporary Shelter. Their delicious meals and hospitality are very much appreciated! The folks at the Shelter have no way to repay a meal, but they do let those in charge know how grateful they are for such outstanding dinners, as well as breakfasts for the next morning.

Another way that members of the Choptank Charge can extend hospitality is by visiting Overflow Café at 400 Muir Street. The meals are very modestly priced, but even at that, there are those in our community who cannot afford breakfast or lunch. However, if you go and put money in the tip jar, you are paying in advance for their meals. Moreover, if you are willing to mingle with the diners, you can become a great sounding board for their stories and even offer a word of encouragement. Some folks, of course, eat there because the food and coffee are so reasonably priced. Others come because the Café is one place in town—perhaps the only place—that will treat them with dignity, allow them to stay as long as they like, and ensure that they are fed, regardless of their ability to pay.

The dinners and breakfasts at the Temporary Shelter, as well as the breakfasts and lunches at Overflow Cafe, clearly demonstrate the love of Jesus and faithful, Christian hospitality. What other ways can you think of to accomplish the same purposes?

Well, this is what Jesus teaches, but is there an undercurrent here we need to be aware

of? Yes, there is. It seems that whenever Jesus and the religious leadership get together, there is some kind of conflict. And, as we've already mentioned, that's true here as well. The guests are eyeing Jesus, even as he is eyeing them. Moreover, In the first six verses here, Jesus has already healed a man of edema, a man who not incidentally does not seem to be an invited guest. In fact, the man left as soon as he was healed. The other guests had, remarkably, held their peace and Jesus remained at his place.

You may recall from several weeks ago, that Jesus said he would be the cause of division, even within families where people didn't see eye to eye on his mission and ministry. That division started long ago. And throughout history, it has certainly been part of life in the church. Were it not so, we would not have 180 denominations, per the Pew Research Center? People disagreed with one another and split off to form new churches. But it need not be so. And it is not so here.

May you always love and care for one another in the way that Nan has seen you do during her tenure here. District Superintendent Davis will be responsible for the Charge until a new pastor is appointed. Please give him and the new pastor the kind of help and love you have given to Nan. Yes, he or she will bring different gifts and graces to the table, but much can be learned from each person. Nan just wants to say that these six years have flown by. She already misses all of you. Our paths will cross again, if not here, then in God's eternal kingdom. God be with each of you until we meet again!

Love, Nan