

Sermon 100216 Humility  
Scripture Luke 14: 7-14  
Sermon Title- Eating Humble Pie

Today's gospel lesson we take from the Gospel of Luke. In the Gospel of Luke, one thing appears clear about Jesus: he ate a lot. There is a phenomenal amount of stories in this gospel in which he is about to eat, he is eating, he had just eaten or he's talking about eating or at least sitting at the table. He would have been very comfortable at Union Church. It's amazing that Jesus is so thin in every known artistic depiction of him. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus uses table stories in order to instruct us on how we can be the people he wants us to be. It is also worthy of note that he is such a keen observer of human behavior yet still loves us enough to be sacrificed for us.

In today's story, he tells a parable of a wedding feast because he's seen people grab the better spots around a table. He tells them that they are better off taking the lesser spots at the table with the possibility of being asked by the host to move up to a more prestigious spot at the table as opposed to grabbing a more prestigious spot only to be humiliated by being asked to move to a lesser spot. Jesus

says in verse 11, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” This sentence sounds like one of the beatitudes like- “The meek shall inherit the earth.” It has the ‘reversal of fortune’ theme heard so often in Jesus’ preaching.

Now, one of the really good things about this parable is that it is so easy to understand what Jesus is talking about here, which we know is not always the case with parables. We have all had the experience of deciding where to sit around the table. We know where the power seats are. I remember a business book that was written about 15 years ago by a woman for women in business. It was a ‘how to’ book on things like dressing for success. It was a survival manual for women emerging into the business world dominated by men. She devoted an entire chapter on how to take seats around the table in a meeting room. It was a very complicated study, indeed. It warned against appearing too pushy but still find a power seat at the table, stuff like that.

We’ve all had those moments of uncertainty. Where is a choice chair and should I grab it; or where can I be the

most inconspicuous; or I'll sit anywhere as long as I'm not next to Blowhard Stan. It's complicated stuff. Jesus is coaching us on one aspect of the calculation.

There is a pecking order in life. There are people in the world who have higher reputations (more exalted, so to speak) than others do and there are people who remain in the background more than others do. Interestingly, Jesus accepts that as the way of the world without commentary. We don't learn what Jesus thinks about the fact that there is a pecking order, but we get help from him on how to negotiate our way through it. He is saying that we all have reputations, and be careful about having a self-image that is higher than what others think of you because if you do, there will be a fall and the fall will hurt. Good advice, indeed.

Our reputations, for better or worse, can be makers or breakers in our personal successfulness. Verse one of the twenty-second chapter of the Book of Proverbs states, "A good name is more desirable than great riches." However, reputation is only part of the equation. I read somewhere, I'm sorry I can't recall where that, "Reputation is what

people think of you while ‘character’ is what God knows of you.” Reputation, although invisible, is more visible to the world than character. Reputation is the visible tip of the iceberg, while character occupies vast areas below the surface.

Reputations are to be taken seriously, however. One of the complications is that we might or might not be very good at finding our place in the reputation pecking order. Where we see ourselves sitting at the table is in tension with where others see themselves sitting at the table.

We all know people who believe that they are a cut above. They will be quick to inform you on what a good person they are, or how smart, knowledgeable and clever they are, or how good they are at their job, or how popular they are, how much money they make, how faithful they are, whatever. I’d like you not to raise your hand but answer to yourself, ‘Do you really enjoy being around someone like that?’ You might even want to ask yourself if you are that type of person. Let’s say we are not. Let’s say that we, the Union Church faithful, *never ever brag on ourselves*. When you are with someone like that, have you

ever secretly wished that they'd get knocked down a couple of pegs and you'd like to be there to watch? That's exactly what Jesus is warning against here. "He who exalts himself will be humbled." Jesus is recognizing that it is our reputation that is at stake, but he is speaking to our character.

All we need to do is look at the facts to be humble. Each and every one of us is a sinner. No matter how much we know it is a drop in the ocean of what there is to be known. No matter what we have achieved, we still have achieved very little in the end. No matter how important we consider ourselves to be, after we are gone, life and work will go on just the same. The cemeteries are full of indispensable people. Even the person, who the world looks at as the greatest of all time at something, knows things that he is lousy at. If we honestly look at ourselves, we'll all stay away from the scramble for the exalted seat at the table.

In Shakespeare's great play, *Hamlet*, there is a scene where Polonius is saying goodbye to his son, Laertes, who is leaving on a life journey. It is a famous speech with some immortal lines in it like, "neither a borrower nor a

lender be.” The end of the speech has the father saying to his son,

*This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
You cannot then be false to any man.*

Jesus is helping us to show some character and if we do, we’ll take the humble place at the table and be glad we did. Character is what God knows about us. “He who is humbled will be exalted.” Jesus knows we need help. He is there to help us. As we stand before God, as we stand before the sacrifice and the perfection of Jesus, we are humbled by his love. AMEN