



Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. **AMEN**

I need your help this morning, so we are going to start out with an interactive beginning to my message. I need to have your input on a few things. I hope I am right and that my assumptions will be proven, and I can continue with my message thereafter. Here is how it will work. I will say a word and you say simply "good" or "bad". Easy as that. I need to hear your answers, so here we go.

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| • God                        | • Devil                                      |
| • Vanilla Ice Cream          | • Chocolate Ice Cream                        |
| • Cooking Dinner             | • Cutting the Grass                          |
| • Shopping                   | • Napping                                    |
| • Green Bay Packers          | • Minnesota Vikings                          |
| • The back row at a concert. | • The back row at a Lutheran worship service |

Just as I figured, we all have various positions on what is good and what is bad, what is pleasant and what is unpleasant, what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. It all depends on our experience or on our perspective.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was invited to the house of a Pharisee. He had been invited to join in a meal on the Sabbath. I do believe that the Pharisees had an ulterior motive. They were not only afraid but skeptical of Jesus. This was a good way to see for themselves how Jesus behaved, particularly on the Holy Sabbath. The dinner party was about to begin and as was the custom, the guests rushed to sit in the front row, unlike those of you who are here today, who prefer to sit in the back. You see sitting in the front, you could see better, you were among the best people and most likely you would be served the meal first.

Observant Jesus noticed that the rich, with their fine clothes were seated at the front of the room and those in the back wore plain clothes and were much more subdued. And Jesus could not help himself to make his observations public. He then told a parable, the parable

of the wedding banquet. An interesting parable all about how we should conduct ourselves by not being presumptuous and sitting in a place of honor. For how horrible it would be to be asked to move to the back of the room. Rather, it would be better to sit in the back and have the host move you up to the front. Jesus concludes by saying, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." WOW.

In that context, I would not be surprised if Jesus had taken a chair to the back of the room, flipped it around and told the folks to do the same with their chairs so they could see and listen to his teachings. So the back row, actually became the front row, and Jesus could surely teach that the great were humbled, and the humble were made great.

I will never forget a good living parable, when I was doing an internship at Holy Cross in Menomonee Falls. Our youth and parents were going to take a fabulous taco lunch to an inner-city church in Milwaukee. We took vats of seasoned ground meat, cheese, tomatoes, lettuce, and plenty of taco shells. After we worshiped with the folks that were present in the church, my entourage went downstairs to get the meal set up. We served many people that day. It was a large church with lots of children, many of whom came alone on a bus just to sit and listen to Pastor Mary Martha, (A great name!) a wonderful soul. Well, after the serving line had finished, we all fixed a plate and went to sit down in their Fellowship Hall to also enjoy the meal. There were probably 6 parent chaperones and 6 to 8 youths. They all squeezed around two tables in the back of the hall. I went and sat with two women and their children at the front table. We visited for quite some time. I shared about my life and they about the struggles of raising children in the inner city, where it is not always a safe place. I felt humbled they allowed me to see a piece of what it was like to be a single mom with young children in the poorest section of Milwaukee.

And that brings me to the next story Jesus tells, the Pharisee who is throwing the banquet. Jesus actually scolds him for inviting only beautiful people to the party. Jesus says, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Another WOW. I was truly blessed to have had the opportunity to enjoy these two women I ate lunch with. Jesus was in that encounter, and I was blessed to be able to see a little into their lives.

You see these two stories are all about humility. In fact, as I studied the 4 Scripture texts this week, I saw humility lying at the center of all of them. And we all know that humility is counter cultural in the world today, yet it is definitely the way of God's kingdom.

Our world tells us to be proud, to race to the top of the heap, no matter who you have to climb over. We idolize beautiful people. Celebrities and athletes are the ones we watch and seek to emulate. That is until they fall from grace by using their power to break the law or make it into their own shades of grey.

Just for fun I looked up the word humble on dictionary.com. It said: "not proud or arrogant, modest, having a feeling of insignificance, inferiority, low in rank or importance or status, and courteously respectful. So yes, Jesus is telling us to be humble, to go against the norm. Ah, even to get out of our comfort zone. And that is an interesting idea, get out of our comfort zone. How would you like it if I asked you to all come sit in the first two pews on the opposite side of the sanctuary than you are sitting now. Most of you might feel out of

your comfort zone, or you would think I have lost my mind. So, I won't do that today, but think with me a moment about how we can get out of the comfort zone the world calls us to and enter the humble zone God has prepared for us.

I think Jesus in these two stories is not just suggesting to us but asking us to get out of our comfort zones and shape our lives as ones of humility. Life is bigger than being in our own little comfort zones. Jesus has a better way for us to live.

Jesus' entire life demonstrates it. His entire life, his public ministry, the passion, and resurrection is full of one episode after another of not remaining in a comfort zone. Jesus takes the low seat and invites the lowly to be his guests. And he actually gets the worst seat of all on the cross. He then leaves what comfort zone he did have of earthly life. And with grace he moves on to experience resurrection life, sitting at the right hand of his Father.

Here at Christ the Servant it is one of my jobs to get you out of your comfort zone and ask you to minister to the neighbor. Have you all signed up yet to work in the food pantry on Saturday the 10th? It is important work to feed those that are food insecure in our community. Not easy work, but it is what we are called to do. Or will you be here on September 11<sup>th</sup> as we bless and pray over the quilts and kits to go to Lutheran World Relief? Have you donated some extra cash to get those items where they need to go?

Many are the ways that we can shift out of our comfort zone and humbly walk with the Lord. Not only will costly service stretch us but also so will reading Scripture, thinking about our faith and what we really believe, helping others on their faith journey, giving generously, and growing in our own spirituality. Yes, I know that it is all counter intuitive, but we must say "no" to the ways of the world and "yes" to the ways of God.

So, I hope you will take a small step soon to walk humbly with our God. You don't have to have a huge banquet and invite all the homeless in the county. You don't have to teach Sunday Monday school this semester, all by yourself. You don't have to park at the end of the grocery store parking lot every time you go to Super One. And you certainly don't have to work in the food pantry every Saturday. But try to get out of your comfort zone and with humility serve your Lord. You could even try sitting in the front row next Sunday here at Christ the Servant! **AMEN**