

Jeremiah 2:4-13
Psalm 81:1, 10-16
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
Luke 14:1, 7-14

We live in the age of self-promotion. Let's see. There's Facebook and Instagram; twitter and What's App; Tumblr and snapchat; Pinterest and LinkedIn; myspace and snapfish...and those are just the ones I've heard of. There are several hundred others online that are vying for our attention. And then there are the dating apps like Match and Tinder; Elite and OurTime; and Zoosk and Silver Singles, which apparently is designed specifically for those in an older age bracket. If you loose track of someone who has been in your life or you just have a question in general, you can always Google it. Information of all kinds is at our fingertips and we are encouraged to 'put ourselves out there' so that people will know who we are and we might even develop a 'following.' It's not unusual for people on these platforms to count the number of 'likes' they get on a post or the number of 'followers' they have. All of which plays into some distorted notion of self-worth. All of us who are putting ourselves 'out there' for public consumption seem to be jockeying for position in a world that is constantly fluid and rarely real.

It shouldn't surprise us at all that Jesus has something to say about jockeying for position in general and about us in particular. We are moving about in a world with slightly different rules than the world that Jesus occupied. But the nature of human beings tends to remain the same from generation to generation. We all want to 'fit in.' We all want to feel good about ourselves. We all want to be recognized by our peers. And the folks who lived in Jesus' world were no different. They wanted all these things for themselves, too. The social conventions may have changed...the rules of the road so to speak...but the aspirations and motivations of human beings remain remarkably the same.

Jesus lived and ministered in a social world that was based on shame and honor. The object of the exercise was to increase as much honor for one's self and one's family as possible...and to decrease or completely hide whatever shame might arise. Shame and honor were not only social conventions, they could determine one's economic fortune or misfortune as well. And a person's reputation in general could make or deny a good marriage. People wanted to be around other people who had sterling reputations and comfortable bank accounts. That part hasn't changed much. We all enjoy that. But in Jesus' world, the villages were smaller and the information about a person's character was more easily revealed. People didn't want to do business with someone who did shameful things or someone who didn't have good manners or someone who had no social graces or someone who had no savvy about the world. People like

that were shunned by others. They were kicked to the margins of the social order. That's why bearing false witness was so devastating. And it still is. A person's ability to survive economically often depended on their good name and their good reputation. It made doing business with other people much easier and sometimes more profitable. There was no shortage of people vying for the top position as the most important man in town. Everyone was jockeying for position.

As we look in on Jesus this morning, we learn that he has been invited to have dinner at the home of one of the Pharisees...certainly one of the most important and influential men in town. Jesus doesn't have the kind of pedigree that the Pharisee has, but he has developed a reputation for healing people and for speaking with authority and for performing miracles...all of which makes Jesus an important and potentially dangerous man. As Jesus enters the home where the dinner will be served, he notices how people are jockeying for position. Each one of them wants to sit near the head of the table where the host and the guest of honor will sit. This is not a situation where 'first come, first serve' rules apply. In this situation, the places of honor were designated by the host himself, so Jesus gives some very sage advice for those elbowing their way toward the head of the table. "Go and sit at the lowest place, so if the host wishes to do so, he can move you up to a more honored position at the table." Anyone sitting in an honored position that is asked to move toward a less impressive spot would be covered in shame. Jesus just wants to protect people from their own foolishness. And he wants all of us to think about the feast that the Father will be offering in heaven. He's giving good advice. Better that you underestimate your standing than that you overestimate it. And Jesus adds, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Jesus is speaking not just of polite societal table manners. Jesus is also talking about the kingdom of God and the heavenly feast that God is preparing for his creation that includes all of us. It's never a bad idea to interject a little humility where humility is scarce. There is a theological point here as well. We are reminded in St Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:6-11 that "Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death...even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The humbling came before the exaltation.

As if there were any doubt in our minds about what we are to do to follow Jesus, think back to those people who were persons of power in Jesus' day and whose names have been handed

down to us only because of their interactions with Jesus. There was Pilate and Casesar and Herod and Caiaphas...all great and powerful men in their day according to the conventional measurements of power. They had no hesitation about occupying the places of honor. How did things work out for them? We can see from our vantage point that "all those who exalt themselves will be humbled."

Jesus wanted to teach us about genuine humility, not false modesty. Genuine humility lives in the human heart and directs not only our conscious actions, but our unconscious ones as well...the things we do by instinct. The genuinely humble person doesn't have to jockey for position. The genuinely humble person feels that he or she belongs in the less prestigious position. And perhaps that's why Jesus added his second piece of advice at this gathering.

Jesus not only doesn't want us to jockey for position at the table, Jesus wants us to take a look at the table we are joining or the table we are setting. Jesus wants us to gather around us those people who are beyond worrying about social position...those people who know that aren't even going to get an invitation, let alone have to worry about what seat to take. Jesus tells us to invite the poor to our table; invite the crippled and the lame; invite the blind; invite the people who dare not let themselves dream of even getting an invitation. Invite the social outcasts, not the ones jockeying for position. That's what Jesus wants us to do. And he doesn't distinguish between those who are worthy and deserving and those who are not. Invite them all, Jesus says.

If we are privileged enough to have a table to set, then we are in position to turn that privilege into a blessing for others. Think about the people Jesus intentionally lifted up during his ministry. These are the people he blesses. These are the people for whom the kingdom of God has been prepared. Jesus says, "When you give a banquet....." These are the people to invite. Theologically, when Jesus speaks about a banquet, he is speaking of the reign of God, the kingdom of heaven. Each Sunday morning we go to the Lord's table and we share in theThe Lord's Supper, the Holy Eucharist. It's a foretaste of the wedding banquet prepared by God when people will come from east and west from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom God. If you are privileged enough to host a banquet, turn your privilege into a blessing for others by inviting them. You might be surprised if you do and you might come to realize that you yourself are the one who has been blessed by the experience.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.