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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, August 28, 2022
12th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 22/Year C

First Reading: Proverbs 25:6-7

Second Reading: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Gospel Reading: Luke 14:1, 7-14

Sermon Title: “A Lesson in Humility”

Theme

Invited and inviting—that is the nature of the church. By God’s grace in holy baptism we have a place at Christ’s banquet table. When, by the power of that same Spirit, humility and mutual love continue among us, the church can be more inviting still.

Texts:

First Reading: Proverbs 25:6-7

⁶Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence
or stand in the place of the great;
⁷for it is better to be told, “Come up here,”
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

Second Reading: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

¹Let mutual love continue. ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. ⁴Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. ⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” ⁶So we can say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?”

⁷Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the

outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ¹⁵Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Gospel: Luke 14:1, 7-14

¹On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

⁷When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

¹²He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Sermon

I'm pretty sure no one likes to be humiliated, though I've seen a lot of people do stupid things and post them on the internet. This remains a mystery to me. That is not my jam.

In part, today's readings are about humility which is the opposite of humiliation. Maybe a better way of saying it is, humiliation is the reaction one might get for acting without humility.

The First Reading and Gospel Reading speak of a particular humiliation that the authors think we ought to avoid.

In the First Reading, for example, the author warns that it is bad form to put one's self forward in the presence of a king. Make a note of that, will you? The author wrote that it is better when in the presence of a king, to be asked to "Come up here" to be summoned forward, in other words. Have any of you ever met a monarch? I have not. And I think that most Americans are not all that captivated with monarchs anyway.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee for dinner on the Sabbath.

In the Gospels generally, and in the Gospel of Luke specifically, meals are metaphors for the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God represents the world as God intends it to be, in contrast to the way the world is.

Remember this because I will come back to it.

Allow me to point out that 1) this is Luke chapter fourteen and Jesus has been doing battle with the Pharisees for some time, and 2) it's the Sabbath, and Jesus surely knew, based on last week's Gospel Reading from chapter thirteen, that the Pharisees were up to something. And Luke added that "they were watching him closely."

Jesus observed the guests posturing for the "places of honor," and given that he knew that the Pharisees were not his friends and that it was the Sabbath and teaching might be considered work, he decided to go to work on them and teach them a lesson on humility. It was the custom in first-century Palestine that the most

important guests sat closest to the host. So if you wanted to rub shoulders with the most important people at the party, sit as close as you can to the host.

Of course, what can happen is that the host's feelings for you may not be the same as your feelings for the host, and the host says, "Please scoot down. I need this seat for so and so," the implication is that so and so is more important to the host than you are, and this goes on through the cocktail hour until you have been scooted down to your place on the pecking order of invited guests. So there you are, in front of everyone, playing musical chairs until no one more important than you arrives, in that last seat right near the swinging door leading to the kitchen.

What Jesus said you ought to do is, take the seat that is lowest and furthest from the host and let the host tell you to move up. Then you will be honored in front of all the guests, and at the very least you won't look like a fool.

Now, I've thought about this and I've never embarrassed myself at a dinner party like this. I wonder if any of you have. Today at fancy wedding receptions place cards are used to assign seating. I've never been offended by my assigned seat – good or bad. Maybe this is a cultural thing that doesn't apply to us.

But Jesus didn't stop there, did he? Beginning in verse twelve, he indicated that folks who throw dinner parties tend to throw them for each other. You have me to your house, then I feel obliged to invite you to my house and so on. Could just be me, but I am not out to impress anyone. If you get invited to my house, it's probably because I enjoy your company. And if you feel the same way about me, you might invite me back to your house someday. This is what we do right? Is Jesus saying this is wrong?

What he did say was,

“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite *the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind*. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

I'm just gonna say it for you, we don't do that, do we? Am I right?

Here we have a problem, don't we? We love Jesus, and call him our Lord and Savior, and our example of godly living. If it wasn't for his mercy on us we wouldn't have salvation. We want to express our love and devotion through obedience, and yet we don't follow this little instruction.

At the beginning of the sermon I told you to remember that:

In the Gospels generally, and in the Gospel of Luke specifically, meals are metaphors for the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God represents the world as God intends it to be, in contrast to the way the world is.

So do I think that Jesus is telling us to invite the “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” into our homes? Yes, maybe so, I don't know for sure. But I think that question misses the point. I don't think Jesus cares that much about who we hang around with, who are friends are, and so on. After all, it could be argued that Jesus' disciples were about as homogeneous a group as could be.

But if this statement is true, then what Jesus is really talking about is the Kingdom of God in the here and now. Look around, do you see the “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” here and now? I don't. I wonder why that is? And I think that wonderment is what this Gospel Reading is all about.

For your information, this building is 100% barrier-free. We have wheelchairs available for those that need them. Handicap-accessible restrooms. Those shortened pews, the “Kevin Glines” pews are shortened to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers and the like. Why aren't they used? I am so glad you asked. We should ponder that.

Do people know we are 100% barrier-free and all the rest? I don't think we are prepared today to assist someone who is blind, but wouldn't that be a noble challenge for us? Have we invited them? If we invite them, and they come, will they feel welcome here, or become more of a spectacle?

I think that focusing on the “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” also misses the greater point. I think that the “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” are merely metaphors for what Jesus said was wrong with his religion then, and which I

extend to us and our religion now. The “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” are metaphors for all who have been told they are unclean, broken, unworthy, misfits who don't belong here, and maybe don't belong anywhere.

Do we make an effort to welcome those who we think are unclean, broken, unworthy, misfits? Do we make an effort to welcome those who themselves think Now we are fussing with a contemporary version of Jesus' teaching to the Pharisees!

This is confirmed in the letter to the Hebrews in which the author wrote:

¹Let mutual love continue. ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Wow! Wouldn't you like to be able to say, “We entertain angels here!” How about we put that on the digital sign out front!

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

I imagine some of you are thinking that I am out of my mind.

I imagine some of you are thinking, “We don't get those people now, how would seeking them out get them here?”

But I also imagine that some of you might be thinking, “I think he's onto something. We should be about welcoming everyone, and especially those whom society has made to feel they are unclean, broken, unworthy, misfits.

Isn't our God revealed in Jesus Christ awesome?”

In the Lutheran tradition, we celebrate Holy Communion each week by coming forward to receive the body and blood of Christ. Other Christian traditions do it differently. I think our way is best because after hearing the words that convict in the readings and the sermon we are humbled and ready to stand up and come forward beneath the cross, empty-handed to receive that which only God in Christ can give. This is the body and blood of Christ given for you for the forgiveness of sins. There is no question of the magnitude or amount of our sins. No issue of our uncleanness, brokenness, or unworthiness, Jesus won't call us misfits. He just bids

us come and be welcome at the table of grace. Hear the words of forgiveness and receive the food that nourishes us for another try at doing better.

Jesus was invited to a meal and it was recorded in scripture. Don't ever think that the message is limited to what is written on the page. Meals are metaphors for the Kingdom of God. And in this story, Jesus was telling us that the Kingdom of God is not about positioning ourselves closest to the throne, but about including as many as is possible around the throne, especially those that others, maybe even us, consider unclean, broken, unworthy, misfits.

God is the creator of all. Let us not be deluded into thinking that somehow we are better than anyone else. That kind of thinking will lead to our humiliation. But following Jesus's teaching, let us act with humility, and honor all that God has created. ¹⁴And *we* will be blessed, ... and repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Prayer

O God, you resist those who are proud and give grace to those who are humble. Inspire us to think less about ourselves, and more graciously about others, especially those who society considers unclean, broken, unworthy, misfits. Give us the humility of your Son, that we may embody the generosity of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen