

**Faith Enough to Wait**

COMMUNION

September 1, 2019 - Jo

Scripture: Luke 14: 1 and 7-14

*<sup>4</sup> On 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...*

*<sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup> "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; <sup>9</sup> and 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. <sup>10</sup> But 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. <sup>11</sup> For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

*<sup>12</sup> He 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. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*



Today we conclude our "Pillars of Faith" sermon series.

Starting next week, we will begin a twelve-week series called "What Disciples Do", which looks at how disciples practice generosity, wrestle with God, and take their faith public, to name just a few of the topics.

Let us pray...

Our passage today opens with these words in verse one: *"Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath - they were watching him closely"*. Last week we read from Luke 13, where Jesus healed on the Sabbath, healing a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years. It is still fresh in their minds, so they are keeping an eye on Jesus. Well, Jesus heals again on the Sabbath. And after healing the man with dropsy, Jesus again silences the lawyers and Pharisees. Here, in verses two through six, we hear this story. Please read along with me:

*"Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?"*

*But they were silent. So, Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well...*

*... will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day? And they could not reply to this".*

- Luke 14: 2-6

*<sup>2</sup> Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. <sup>3</sup> And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" <sup>4</sup> But they were silent. So, Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. <sup>5</sup> Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" <sup>6</sup> And they could not reply to this.*

Jesus again chooses to extend mercy and love instead of withholding these from the person in need of healing. And again, like last week, the religious leaders cannot respond. You would think that the Pharisee's house must have been charged with emotion as our passage from today continues. But it is not. Those there quickly turn to finding a good seat for the meal that is about to occur.

At the Pharisee's home, Jesus sees people rushing to the seats of honor – the “first couches” or the “chief couches”. In response, Jesus offers some advice about how to choose seats at a hypothetical wedding banquet. Jesus' words are centered on humility – exactly the opposite of what he sees happening at the Pharisee's house. In verses eight and nine we first hear Jesus' warning: *"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; and 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"*. In this warning, Jesus is addressing the realities of the honor-shame culture that existed at that time. To be removed from the seat you chose, to be walked down to the end of the row, to be placed at the bottom of the social ladder – that would be very shame-filled. I wonder how many of those with seats close to the place of honor heard Jesus' words and began looking around, re-evaluating their choice of seats. Judging from the fact that as soon as the healing was done and the fireworks were over, they began jostling for the best seats, we can assume that Jesus' words fell mostly on deaf ears that day.

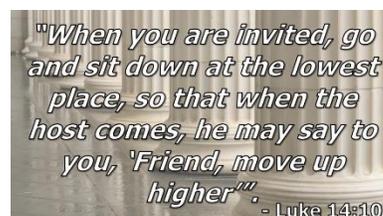


**Faith Enough to Wait** One might then assume that Jesus was speaking more to the disciples there with him that day or to those who would hear the story repeated later that week or to those of us who read or hear the story many years later. Yes, like the men that Jesus observed at the Pharisee's dinner who wanted seats higher than anyone else, there are folks today who will jostle for position, who will reach for telling titles, who will run to the top places. I am sure that none of us here are like that, right? Perhaps we are not that bold and forward. But if not, maybe you are more like me. Maybe, like me, your desire for recognition is more subtle.

When we are honest, deep down we all like attention. In our own subtle ways, we will try and have people notice the nice or wonderful or generous things that we do. In our own subtle ways, we will try and draw attention to our importance or to ourselves so that we can be seen in certain places or with certain people. Jesus warns that the path of pride is dangerous. Yet the path of pride is tempting because much of the time we suffer from a desire for recognition and immediate gratification in terms of our work and worth. To a very large degree, we still live in the honor-shame culture of Jesus' day. To be invited to a better seat – to be recognized - is most gratifying. To be moved to a lesser place is a great humiliation. So why do we make the run for the place of honor? For many of us, we think we deserve it. That really is the heart of the matter.

We may not rush to the "seat of honor" any longer, but we do play the game. You may be thinking, 'how do we play this game today'? Many of us we toot our own horn as we advertise how wonderful we are on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so on. But sometimes our means are more insidious. We play the game in our own minds, where it is private, where it feels safe. In private it is safe to judge ourselves better than another. In our own minds it is easy to tell ourselves that we are the best ever. Inside our heads and hearts, we can easily criticize and tear down others, elevating ourselves in the process, upping our own sense of importance and worth.

As our passage goes on, starting again in verse ten, Jesus shows a better way. Here Jesus gives this advice: *"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*". It will not be false or fake, but genuine and honest. You see, in the honor-shame culture of Jesus' day, honor was bestowed on you by another and it was usually bestowed by the host. To claim honor and then to not have it reciprocated by your audience, or by the host, would bring much public humiliation. To make a bid for honor that might not be granted was to take a big risk. Even so, many in Jesus' story strived for the best seat. Again, we see this happen over and over today. To keep us from erring in this way and to maybe speak into the hearts of those who might lean that way now and then, Jesus instructs the hypothetical guests and us today to practice humility rather than pride, arrogance, or ego. There is a why: because your humility will be recognized by the one who matters and there will be a reward. The one with all the power will notice you and will bring you honor.



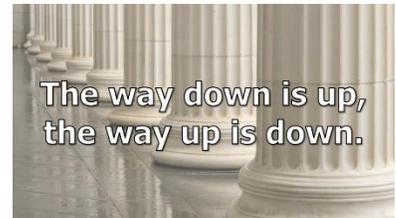
This simple story about checking our pride in social settings also has a faith application. Funny thing, but often when one is doing the "work of God", there arises a strong desire to be noticed, to be recognized for one's work. To be honest, I struggle with this a little bit. For example, something inside me twinges a little bit when we must make sure the newspaper can be there to cover our act of kindness. I struggle another way as well but is on the exact opposite end of the spectrum from the first example. This would happen back when I was teaching too, so I would guess a lot of you struggle in a similar way. Sometimes I worked hard on something, putting in what I felt was a lot of effort. The event or the lesson or whatever happened and then it was just over. The human inside wants someone to notice or to at least acknowledge the effort or the end product. The desire for recognition and approval is strong.

Pride and ego are powerful. If left unchecked, they must be fed. Being humble requires great effort and it is something we will always struggle with if we try and battle on our own. It requires help from above. Humility is rooted in our assurance of our worth in the eyes of God. That is something that the world cannot take from us. Humility is connected to our place in God's family, to our sense of well-being because we are a child of God. Because of this, humility calls us to do the right thing, even when no one else is looking. Humility calls us to serve the other, even when it is hard and even when they do not say 'thank you'. Humility invites us to walk the walk of faith regardless of the reward or lack of reward in this time and place. Faith trusts that we have not been overlooked and believes that we will not be overlooked. Faith trusts that our treasures are in heaven. Yet a part of us still wants God to notice our faithfulness, our devotion, our love for God and neighbor. We too want to be known one day as a pillar of faith. How do we walk this line? It is difficult.

Turning to verses twelve through fourteen, Jesus offers thoughts on how we can store up treasures in heaven, on how God blesses us when we act with humility and generosity and with a servant's heart. In these three verses, Jesus illustrates how we should select the guest list if we were to be the one hosting a luncheon or dinner. In the opening story, the people were jostling for position. The guest list must have been something – quite the A-list crowd. Admittedly, that is the guest list we like to be on. But that atmosphere can become selfish and judgmental and critical. This is what Jesus speaks against in these verses. Jesus reminds us, when you invite your friends or family or rich neighbors, what happens? They reciprocate and invite you over. And then, as Jesus says in verse twelve, "*you would be repaid*". You have received your earthly reward.

Instead of extending an invitation and offering hospitality in this 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' manner, Jesus advises us to instead invite *"the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind"* – those that cannot repay you. Be truly generous, expecting nothing in return. Then, he tells us in verse 14, *"you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"*. Our reward will be those treasures in heaven.

What Jesus is teaching today in these two stories are clearly paradoxes. Both can only be seen and understood through eyes of faith. Jesus says to us: the way down is up, and the way up is down. It takes a lot of faith to believe that appearing to do the opposite thing is what will grant, in time, the desired outcome.



Fill the room with those who can give you absolutely nothing and you will be blessed. The scriptures are filled with just such admonitions: if you want to have, you must give away; if you want to live, you must be willing to die; if you want to be great, you must be willing to be a servant to all.

We began this series with another paradox based upon Hebrews 11:1, which reads, *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"*. The paradox: in faith, there is conviction without proof. During the series, there were others as well. In faith, we can see what the eyes cannot see. In faith, the crippled are healed and become courageous. And today: in faith, greatness comes not through self-elevation but through humility and faith in God. This week may we walk humbly with our God. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

1. Grow. How does increasing your assurance of faith allow you to live with greater humility?
2. Pray. What leads you to desire recognition and accolades? Pray for God to free you from these entanglements.
3. Serve. How does stepping down and serving the least work against being prideful? Whom and where can you serve this week?