

Proverbs 25:6-7
Psalm 112
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
Luke 14:1, 7-14

Sermon Sept 1st, 2019

What it Looks Like to Live in the Midst of God's Hospitality

“When Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable” (Luke 14:7 NRSV). When I reflect on this verse I wonder how often Jesus notices how we choose the places of honor in our lives? For example, we invest a lot of time, energy, and thought into making money and gaining possessions. Some of us work a lot of overtime or take on a second or even a third job. Some of us go to school for almost a decade so we can get a half decent paying job. Some of us take out a lot of credit to keep up. We invest a lot of time, energy, and thought into making money and gaining possessions, because in our society money/possessions equal status. Money/possessions gives us power and respect from others. So, in a way, to focus so much so on money is like heading to the best seats at the table hoping we are more honored than everyone else. “No way do I want my neighbor driving a larger RV than me.”

Or remember those heated arguments and pushing matches with your siblings in the parking lot as you fought over sitting in the front seat. Your parent yells at you to stop fighting. Or worse, tells you it is your sibling's turn to sit in the front seat. Of course, you think only you deserve to sit in that seat, because you are the oldest, or the most responsible, or the most likable, or the smartest, or the hardest worker.

Or do you remember that friend in high school that you knew was all kinds of wrong for you, but you kept hanging out with them, because they boosted your popularity? Do you still find yourself hanging out with people who influence your social standing in a positive way?

Sometimes I wonder how often Jesus notices how we choose places of honor in our lives?

Jesus goes on to share this parable with us: “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” (Luke 14:8-9 NRSV). As much as Jesus has seen us sprint to the best seats at the banquet, I wonder how many more times Jesus has seen us receive a dose of humility?

For example, you feel on top of the world. You just received a promotion at work. Your friend hooked you up with front row seats to the Garth Brooks concert. And now as you walk down the street you notice this very attractive person wave in your direction. Now your status is really getting to your head. You think to yourself, "I can't believe I still got it." You start to swagger a little. You go to wave back when the person behind you runs up to this person. Embraces them with a hug. And then you watch as they go on their merry way. Reality finally sets in. You feel completely embarrassed. Then your friend calls and says they were unable to get the tickets for you. Then your boss calls and tells you that even though you are getting promoted profits are down this year, and so, salaries are being cut across the board.

It is unbelievable how often we experience this up and down cycle between feeling confident, powerful, up there in status, and then in the next moment falling back down to earth. Starting to doubt ourselves. Feeling a loss of power. Watching as our status drops.

For many of us we continue to cycle back and forth between being exalted and being humbled. For some of us we spend long periods of time being exalted like Stampeder fans. For others we spend long periods of time on the humbled side like Oiler fans. Whatever end of the spectrum we find ourselves on, or even if we stand somewhere in the middle, there are times in our lives where somebody better comes a long. Somebody with more status takes our place. And we have no choice but to find a lower seat.

This message of Jesus is a humbling message for the Pharisees who are used to being exalted. To ask them to let go of some that need to be the best may be an impossible request for them to live up to. Yet, when has Jesus ever backed down from a challenge. And if we think about it everyone of us including the Pharisees at one point or another has experienced what it is like to be humbled. The Pharisees can relate to that feeling of disappointment that comes with not being the most honored. There is the potential there for them to empathize with others in a lower position of honor than them.

Really this message is humbling for us to hear as many of us are used to being exalted. Are used to living with so much privilege. It is easy to let our status go to our heads, and start thinking that it is our right to have all the best seats in life's social circles. Like the Pharisees, we too may feel that Jesus' request is an impossible request to live up to. Yet, like the Pharisees we too have felt the disappointment that comes with not being the most honored. We too have the potential to empathize with others in a lower position of honor than us.

So, like the Pharisees, Jesus continues to challenge us? Inviting us to live humbly. Inviting us to be happy with who we are and what we have. Inviting us to empathize with others who have less. To share in what we have with others. To see that Jesus elevates

all of us no matter what our social standing is in this world to the same status. Or in others words, Jesus makes us all one in Christ Jesus. All equal in the eyes of God.

Jesus goes on to paint a picture for us of what the Kingdom of God is like. A luncheon where everyone who has little to no status in our society is welcome and important. A luncheon where we the people who have been given more status in this world make a difference by opening our doors to those people with little to no status. Elevating them to where we are so we can all stop worrying about who has more or who gets the front seat or who is more popular.

Instead, we become the hospitable people we are called to be. We listen to the plea in the book of Hebrews, “do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it”. We become people who walk together in life loving one another. Loving God. Experiencing God’s love and hospitality, which elevates us to a status that is way more important then any status we will ever receive in this world. A status that says we are loved for who God created us to be, and that we belong.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for your hospitality. For giving us a sense of belonging in a world where we can feel isolated and judged. May your hospitality lift us up so that we can reflect this hospitality before others. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**