

March 3, 2019

Lesson 14: Called to Humility and Hospitality

Scripture: Luke 14: 7-14

Context:

The spring series of the Adult Bible Study focuses on discipleship and mission. However the series is not about the warm fuzzy parts of following of Jesus. Instead, this study is about how following Jesus will rock our world in ways that will challenge our every day walk with Christ.

To start the series, the first lesson begins in the Gospel of Luke. The purpose of the lesson is to recognize the importance of humility in our walk with Christ. Thus, we begin with a parable Jesus told at a dinner party.

This story of Jesus is part of a series of units on Jesus dealing with issues at “the table.” In the ancient world, “table talk” was a place for philosophers and teachers to impart their wisdom to others.¹ However, table fellowship was also full of religious, social, and economic reasons for Judaism and the early church.² Just as table fellowship can hold meanings for us today in our social and professional world, the same goes for the ancient world.

In our text for this morning, Jesus has been invited to a dinner at the home of a Pharisee. He observes the behavior of both the guests and the host, looking to see about the true revelations of character that come from even the smallest of interactions. And when he sees certain behaviors exhibited, he decides to spice up the table talk.

Jesus moves to tell a parable, one of his favorite forms of teaching. Parables are stories that are more than stories; they have a little bit of heavenly wisdom sprinkled in the meaning of it. Parables are meant to provoke the listener and even to be offended because there’s a radical piece in it that challenges and provokes. Odds are that in telling a parable, all parties are going to be offended.

In the parable, Jesus describes a wedding celebration in which someone goes to the place of high honor. However, the seat may have been intended for someone else and the host is moved to ask the eager beaver to take another seat, one that is probably in the least favored section. According to Jesus, the eager beaver is to take the least important place and then the host will be moved to invite them to a better seat. Jesus does not offer a “divinely approved way” for the person to get what they want.³ They are to learn about humility and that sitting in the best seat isn’t always the end goal.

But Jesus also has a bit of advice for the host. The host is warned of seeing hospitality as something by which you gain power over others.⁴ Instead, the host is to provide hospitality because that’s the right thing to do. Just as God is the host of all, we as hosts are really to behave as guest, making no claims, setting no conditions, and

¹ Fred B. Craddock, “Luke,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1990), 175.

² *Ibid.*, 175.

³ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

expecting nothing in return.⁵ It's a radical call to welcome all those who come to the table to feast with one another.

Application

The lesson for this morning certainly starts us off in a challenging part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus is not afraid to tread on those hard places. Both humility and radical hospitality are spiritual disciplines to cultivate in the walk with Christ.

Humility is one of those tricky parts of being a disciple. Every time you seek out to be humble, you sometimes end up being the very opposite! I have always wondered where is the balance. One day though I came across a quote from Archbishop William Temple that is very helpful in thinking about humility: Humility is not about thinking less of yourself than other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all.

What a helpful way to think about what Jesus was alluding to in his parable. Humility is not focused on getting ahead at all by pretending to be meek and lowly. Humility is about staying focused on what you're called to do and not being concerned about the pros or cons about your decision. Many of the people who I consider to be good leaders are humble and do their jobs first and foremost. For example, the clergy I look up to the most are those who make the best decisions for their church and not necessarily for their career. They know their gifts, but it's only to benefit the people of God that they lead and they focus on that current moment of ministry. Rarely do they seek attention. They do what they're called to do being with God's people.

Radical hospitality is the other theme we hear in this text. This one can even be more challenging to a degree as it clashes with our understanding of trade and commerce. Everything comes with a price we say! But when we practice radical hospitality, amazing things can happen. People's lives can be changed and some folks experience Christ's love in such a way that they feel inspired to give back. It may not be the same way or as extravagant, but it is still contagious. And as we are hospitable, our faith deepens with the gift of generosity.

To me, some of the people I am closest to are those who offer radical hospitality and sometimes it is by the most simple of gestures. When I moved to Dothan a year and a half ago, I did not know that many people. Two weeks in I was at a downtown event and meeting different people. As I left, one of my new church members, who I didn't recognize, invited me to dinner with her husband and another one of our young couples. At this nice restaurant, there were trays of food and it was one where you could share plates with others. I got to know these folks who were a little older than me, but were eager to make connections and ask me about my interests and how I found the city so far. There was no attempt to tell me what to do at the church or how I should go about this or that ministry. It was just nice "table talk."

When it came time to pay the bill, all four were emphatic that I would not pay any of the bill. They gave me their numbers and told me that they were there for me and not just for church business. They did not ask for anything in return. They simply wanted me to feel welcomed and supported. I was given the gift of radical hospitality.

What if we were all to do things like these people? Simply do things for others, not with some agenda, but because we want people to know they are supported and

⁵ Ibid., 177.

loved. Take someone to a nice dinner and then pay the bill. Give of your time to something where you won't make a profit. Support a ministry that isn't about your needs being met. Such a difference can be made in our world when we practice radical hospitality.

How will you be humble this week? Are your actions genuine or do they carry an agenda? How are you extending hospitality and care to someone? Are you taking care of someone simply to get ahead? Our scripture lesson this week invites us to be humble, to focus on our calling, and to radically welcome and support people as we meet them. Where is Jesus calling you to demonstrate those good table manners?

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