

**Luke 14:1, 7-14** *One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. . . .<sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: <sup>8</sup> "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. <sup>9</sup> If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. <sup>11</sup> For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." <sup>12</sup> Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

The first will be last: Where are you?

1. Put yourself last
2. Serve others first

Did you ever ride first class on an airplane? Me neither. Do you wonder where that term came from? It goes back to the old West. You've seen western movies, I'm sure, and you have seen the old stagecoaches in them. You would think that everybody riding in the stagecoach paid the same price. But that wasn't the case. There were first, second and third class tickets on every stagecoach. A first class ticket – the most expensive – allowed you to stay on the stagecoach no matter what conditions might be faced. A second class ticket meant that if difficulty arose, you had to get out and walk alongside the stagecoach until the difficulty could be resolved. A third class ticket was the cheapest. This meant that, not only did you have to get out of the stagecoach when there were problems; you would have to help the driver fix it. They might mean getting down in the mud and helping push to get the stagecoach moving. Clearly, you wanted a first class ticket, if you could afford one. (John Claypool)

Jesus reminded us last week that the first will be last and the last will be first. The question is: Where are you?

Have you ever walked into a room and felt like everybody was staring at you? You know, kind of like: What's he doing here? That's what happened to Jesus. It was a Sabbath Day and Jesus had been invited to a Pharisee's house for a lunch party. You know they didn't invite him because he was so popular. They wanted to catch him in some mistake or find some false teaching on his part. They were watching Jesus, but Jesus was also watching them.

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It's hard for us to relate to the situation that Jesus saw, unless we think of a wedding. Often there is a head table with the bridal party and then the parents of the couple usually have a table close to the front. How embarrassing if Cousin Fred and Aunt Ethel barge right up to the head table and proclaim, "Wow! Let's sit here. What great seats! I'll bet this table gets served first! And look, we're close to the cake!" How humiliating when they are banished to the farthest corner of the banquet hall.

We might say that's silly. We wouldn't put ourselves forward like that. If so, picture yourself waiting for help in a store. Several people are waiting but you have been there the longest. When someone finally comes to wait on you and they wait on somebody else instead, what do you do? We complain. We don't want to be last. We want to be first.

Do you remember playing King of the Hill? Our school children still play that when we have the snow pile in the parking lot. You want to be king. You fight to get to the top. That's what everybody wants. They want to be first. They want to be on top. And they want everyone else to know it. Gary Trudeau, the cartoonist, has called America the only country in the world in which failing to promote oneself is regarded as a fault. I can remember a time when football players didn't act like fools every time they made a big play or scored a touchdown. There was

a time when drawing so much attention to yourself was frowned upon. Now, it's expected. Everyone wants to be first and we want everyone to know it.

But remember King of the Hill? What happens to the king? Someone is always there to knock him off the top. So instead of putting ourselves first, let's learn the art of humility and put ourselves last.

That's true in our dealings with people and it's especially true in our relationship with God. We are beggars before God. We come to him empty-handed. None of us can bring anything to God. There is nothing we can pay or do to earn God's forgiveness. Like beggars, all we can do is receive. We deserve nothing from him, but death and hell. And yet Jesus humbled himself to take that for us. Paul wrote, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8)

Have that same attitude that Jesus had, Paul tells us. At the heart of this quality of humility is an attitude of the heart which realizes that all of my gifts come from God. All of my talent. All of my money. All my personality traits which allow me to advance in life. Everything that I have is a gift from God. Humility is grounded in this deep awareness. You cannot have genuine humility without it.

Humility is grounded in a deep core awareness that everything I am and everything I have is totally a gift from God. Therefore, how can I boast? How can I use these God-given gifts as a measuring stick to elevate myself above others?

The first will be last, Jesus said. So where are you? Put yourself last and others first. *Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."* If you didn't get paid, would you work? If your spouse were never nice to you, would you be nice to your spouse? Isn't it true that we often do something for what we get out of it? We give to charities because it makes us feel good. We help a friend because we expect that he will help me sometime. We are often looking for what we can get out of it.

Instead of doing something for what we can get out of it, we should only be looking for how others can be served by what we do. There is a story told about Booker T. Washington. He was an African-American who went from being a child of slaves to the president of a college. While he was president, a woman walked up to him who didn't recognize him, and said to him, "Why don't you come over here and chop some wood for me." She probably looked at the color of his skin and assumed that he was an ex-slave looking for work. Mr. Washington didn't resist. He politely chopped wood for the lady and after it was all over – it took awhile – she gave him a couple coins and said, "Now, be on your way." A few days later this lady discovered who he was, a president of a local college. She went to his office and apologized for treating him in such a low manner. But Mr. Washington was humble. He said, "I don't mind working, I had the time, so I was happy to do it. I believe in being humble, and chopping wood was the perfect way for me to be humble that day." (Don Schultz)

A good test for Christians might be how they treat those who are of no use to them. Let's remember who we are, sinners redeemed by Christ. We are all equally guilty before God and all of us, because of Jesus, are equally justified before God. Remembering that, how can we put ourselves first and not others?

How does that look in our lives? At work we do that by serving our employer as if we were serving Christ. We don't just work for the money but to serve the company you work for. At home, husbands love their wives like Christ loves the Church. Wives submit to your husbands as the Church submits to Christ. Children, obey your parents for this is right. In the church, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Our sinful natures want to be first class. We want to sit in the stagecoach and let others do the dirty work. We want to be served rather than serve. But how can we look at the cross and continue with that attitude? As the Apostle Paul reminds us, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)