

**Sunday, September 2, 2007      Pentecost 14**

Sermon by Dean Keith Joyce

***"How grand the height of the lowly and rejected"* Luke 14:7-14**

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*Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honour, saying to them, <sup>8</sup> "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honour, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, <sup>9</sup> and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at table with you. <sup>11</sup> For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

*<sup>12</sup> He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." [English Standard Version]*

As Christians we understand that the whole of our faith in Christ is for the whole of our lives. This includes social situations and positions of privilege. They are not exclusively for personal benefit or personal advancement at the expense of others. Christ, as he does so often, simply points out that these very realities are to be submitted to the purposes of God and to the service of one's fellow human beings. That can result in a clash between values of the kingdom of God and what our society tells us is important.

Practically speaking, at our next formal dinner, avoid the best seats; they may be for others. If we genuinely are humble about these things it won't really matter where we sit.

Rather than being falsely humble with the secret hope of being invited higher, surely our greatest ambition is to be where Jesus is, to do what Jesus would do, to have his attitudes. Where he is becomes the place of honour, and of true joy, of real happiness, of genuine service.

Even so, it can be a challenge to put into action what Jesus says. For instance, he tells us this morning, *"When you give a dinner, don't invite those who are able to repay you. Invite those who are so poor that they can never repay. Invite the poor, the lame, the crippled, and the blind. And you will be blessed because they can't repay."*

As William Willimon, former Chaplain of Duke University, puts it, "What a guest list. The Kingdom of God is a party with people we wouldn't be caught dead with on a Saturday night. God's dinner party includes those who are poor, lame, crippled, and blind because they have no where else to go on a Saturday.

"Our ethics, our etiquette, can be a matter of reciprocity, a means of getting something for ourselves by giving to others. I invite you because you might invite me back. I give to you so that you might give to me. I invite those best able to return the favour."

It really comes down to motive for why we do things such as entertaining or being entertained, or really for any kind of social interaction with others. I don't for a moment believe Jesus is saying never have friends or family members or colleagues, even if they are important people, over for a meal. The point is that self-centred personal benefit is not the right motive for social relationships in the economy of the kingdom of God; self-centred ambition is not to be the Christian's life.

We are to seek out those whom Jesus came for - the broken, the lost, the rejected, the damaged, the lame, the blind. And as we gather with them around the table of the Lord we need the humility to recognize that we are no better than any of those whom Jesus has drawn to himself. With such humility we are then enabled, deep within our souls, to receive graciously from the Lord his body and his blood.

We, too, without Christ, are broken, lonely, rejected, blind, lame. And without the grace of his healing, his forgiveness, his salvation, his love, we are left to the empty pursuit of pushing for the best seats or perilously gathering around us those whom we think will benefit us by putting us at the head table. That way we protect ourselves from the real needs of others in our neighbourhoods, in our cities and towns, of those who sleep on the streets, of those who are evicted from their residences, of those women who are abused at home or at work, of those who suffer alone because they are not socially acceptable.

Lastly, if *WE* feel like the outcasts, or we know of those who do, we can recall the good news of the sort of people with whom Jesus likes to party. We can recall that we qualify for his guest list, and, when pushed away from the head table, down to the table at the back of the room and behind the pillar, we will meet Jesus seated beside us. He was rejected and despised by others. He knew sorrow and pain and grief. People even hid their faces from him. They spat on him and held him of little worth.

As Mary sang, *"He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away."* And, as we mill about with Christ's invited guests, let us not forget to

hear his promise, "you will be blessed" for he says, earlier in this Gospel of Luke, in the paraphrase version "The Message,"

*You're blessed when you've lost it all.  
God's kingdom is there for the finding.*

<sup>21</sup> *You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry.  
Then you're ready for the Messianic meal.*

*You're blessed when the tears flow freely.  
Joy comes with the morning.*

<sup>22</sup> *"Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out,  
every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me.  
What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is  
uncomfortable. <sup>23</sup> You can be glad when that happens – skip like a lamb, if you like!  
-for even though they don't like it, I do . . . and all heaven applauds.  
And know that you are in good company;  
my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this.*

[Luke 6:20-23, The Message]