



SERMONS THAT WORK

Pentecost 12 – Proper 17 Year C

Graciously Give Up Your Seat

[RCL]: Jeremiah 2:4-13; Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

In today's society, many people live out loud. Between Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, there are a plethora of places to share one's life. Generally, social media posts are positive and highlight only the greatest of accomplishments. People love to display pictures of wonderful, exclusive vacations, job promotions, and great social occasions. There are glimpses offered of their successful children at whatever age – and, of course, terrific pet tricks. All of these posts and tweets are designed to beef up their status to those who have been invited into their online community. Accordingly, viewers are expected to acknowledge and reassure them of their high social status. Some spectators have an earnest desire to live the lives of those offered in virtual society.

In the quest to exhibit our most exciting and best selves, quite often the missing component in those conversations is any sense of humility. Humility is the state of being humble. It is wonderful to share the most positive experiences of yourself, but one must be careful not to appear boastful and give the appearance of lording what you have over others.

In the 14th chapter of Luke, Jesus is continuing his journey towards Jerusalem. He is on a mission. Many, including his disciples, have been on this pilgrimage with Jesus as he healed folks and taught valuable lessons, often through parables. Today is no exception.

Jesus takes a provocative step and accepts a dinner invitation to eat with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were rigid in their thoughts and practices of Judaism. They tended to view Jesus with great suspicion because of his willingness to break with rules and tradition as he went about doing his work. In this gospel, Jesus heals a person on his way into dinner and asks the Pharisees if it was wrong to do so. After all, it was the Sabbath. But they remained quiet.

Once inside, Jesus pays particular attention to the seating arrangements at the dinner. People are apparently jockeying for the best seating at the table. Jesus used this occasion as a teachable moment about humility. He tells us that we are not to immediately flock to the best seat in the house, but rather to move down to a

lower seat and wait to be invited to a perceived place of honor. The anticipation is very challenging because some wonder how they will feel if they are not asked to move to a place of prominence.

As faithful people, there should be a recognition that in the eyes of Jesus, we are all equal. Therefore, where we sit is less important than who we offer a seat to. In our zeal to get ourselves situated, we can begin to look like we are playing a game of musical chairs with a complete emphasis on getting in the right chair on time. Let us not be afraid of where we are seated.

God challenges us to demonstrate a willingness to make space for others at the banquet table. In Hebrews, we are admonished to graciously give up our cherished seat and “show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Jesus’ banquet table can never be a place reserved exclusively for the elite.

On occasion, people who have been marginalized by society find themselves standing on the outside of the banquet room. It can be very difficult for some to gain entry. People of color struggled for centuries to get a seat – any seat – at the table. While some already seated felt an urgent desire to deny such inclusion, others could hear the call of Jesus urging the people of God to show hospitality. Ceding any power to others can be intimidating. Jesus keeps encouraging us to review the guest list and, in a display of proper etiquette, be sure that everyone has a seat. When we live in a spirit of humility, we focus less on ourselves and much more on how to ensure that we make space for everyone. We extend an invitation to others, expecting nothing in return.

Fear of others can create a tendency to refuse to provide space for a multiplicity of voices, and in that process, so many are excluded. The full richness of the Church can never be appreciated as long as this resistance continues. Jesus says that exclusion is not the appropriate response. He calls us all to participate in the banquet. He even models for us what a willingness to break bread with others looks like.

Jesus’ relationship with the Pharisees had been rocky. He addressed them on several occasions, sometimes even accusing them of focusing on unimportant matters and missing the major lessons that were being taught. Jesus urged the group to focus less on the letter of the law and rather to promote the spirit of God’s teaching. For example, healing people on the Sabbath was more important than doing absolutely nothing on the Sabbath.

Jesus drew the attention of his followers to those often forgotten. He admonished people to remember the poor, the widows, and orphans. The banquet table provides a wonderful opportunity for all who are hungry to enjoy a meal.

In spite of the teachings of our Lord, people can sometimes feel very uncomfortable worshipping with the homeless. We are willing to give money for someone to take supplies to them, but some would prefer they not come into the sanctuary. We might be happy to provide lunch bags for them, but we do not necessarily want to kneel next to them at the altar rail. We might be a bit uncomfortable when they participate in the

coffee hour. We should exude a spirit of generosity that welcomes all into our community. Perhaps they are the ones who deserve the seats of honor at the banquet table. If we worry about our place at the table and ultimately offer empty prayers to God about people who are less fortunate than us, we must ask ourselves if we are truly worthy to partake in God's holy banquet. In reality, there are enough seats for everyone.

Jesus yearns to nourish the faithful with grace and goodness. Whenever we arrive at the banquet table, we are offered a fantastic meal filled with love and strength. That meal is intended for all who are present with no regard for social status. In those moments, there is no special section earmarked solely for the privileged. There is no reserved seating for those who can purchase a special seat.

As we humble ourselves before God, our goal should not be focused on attaining the best seat at a banquet or a party. Instead, let us open the doors leading to the hall and invite everyone in. Let us allow our guests to select their seats first and then we will fill in. Let us give thanks to God for providing sustenance for all who are present. In so doing, we will fulfill the instructions provided through Hebrews and Luke.

In the Gospel, Jesus' instruction is clear: "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." The picture of this banquet may be the best one ever to be posted on social media. Amen.

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