

## **“Being Exalted; Being Humbled”**

Luke 14:1, 7-14

September 2, 2007

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist church

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On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. “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. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But 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.”

Prayer.

I don't know about you, but I've always been uncomfortable with social status, as it presents itself to us, here in America. For example, when I'm around a powerful person .... someone who has wealth, political office, or a celebrity .... I'm uncomfortable. I worry that I'll say something improper, without class or sophistication. I worry that they will take notice of my complexion or the fit or brand of my clothes. I worry that I'll trip on that carpet, step into a hole, spill something discoloring, or break wind during a moment of deafening silence. Though I know they put their pants on one leg at a time just like I do, the attitude, tone of voice, and the look all has to do with being privileged, exclusive, that says “sorry, we don't associate with your kind.”

Likewise, I have discomfort at the complete opposite end of the spectrum; but it comes through the radiation of discomfort that emanates from others. While I've always felt comfortable in blue jeans and flannel shirt hanging out down at the fire hall, or flipping burgers and sizzling hot dogs at the local fair booth, I always get a sense that the people around me would rather not have the preacher be there. I don't know if the issue is the education I've earned, the salary I receive, or the fact that ministers are to be righteous,

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and comparatively, that might be embarrassing. Perhaps it has to do with the perceived authority of the office .... or maybe it is a combination of these factors. But the fact remains, though invited, that waitress really doesn't want to pull up a chair and join me in good conversation.

One might think that I am most at ease in a gathering of my peers; people of equal status. But if you are anything like me, when I'm around my equals, other subtle issues sneak in and skew the playing field. And that makes me uncomfortable. We have to watch what we say, how we say it, and how it will be interpreted. One never knows who will be the boss some day! There are issues of comparison and competition, envy, power, and pride. Issues of gender, race, and religion often makes everything far more complicated.

“You must make one heck of a preacher,” you'd probably think sarcastically to yourself. “Can't get along with those over you, under you, or next to you. Well, just who can you get along with?”

I'll tell you.

And my response comes largely from our Epistle lesson from Hebrews and our Gospel lesson from Luke.

With whom do you keep company?

I love being around humble people; not necessarily that I'm humble, but when I'm around truly humble, God loving people, I feel I have the most to benefit by their example. Humility has a lot to teach me. Though I've come a long way in 46 years, there is so much more to living a humble life that one day I pray that I might embrace. The gift of simplicity and downsizing, becoming green in energy consumption, and protecting the environment is a humble stance. It recognizes the fact that others are in the room, and that they have an equal claim to the same resources, the same benefits, the same God we've come to know and experience in our lives.

I love being around loving people; people who not only love those who obviously return their love .... parents, siblings, children, cousins .... but also those who love the unlovable, just because they can. These are the people who volunteer in homeless shelters, read to inner-city kids, collect gloves and mittens for seniors and children, and are people who visits the prisoner, the sick, the shut-in, and the dying.

Sometimes loving people are outwardly demonstrative, other times, quiet and reflective. But just remember, whether or not one is emotional, touchy, or huggy has little to do with how loving they may be. Some of the most loving people I know are quiet and reserved. Almost without exception, loving people recognize the fact that love first comes from God,

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and that it is meant to be shared.

I love rubbing elbows with hospitable people. These people may have the most to teach me. Hospitable people anticipate the needs of others and address them, aggressively and pre-emptively, before those needs become a problem. Hospitable people greet the traveler with a warm washcloth, to remove the grit and grime from their face and hands. Hospitable people know the value of a warm meal and a hot shower. Hospitable people put others first in line, themselves second. They know, they are assured, that God has set a place for them. Hospitable people smile and rarely complain, they laugh a lot and give up their last umbrella to a stranger if it begins to rain. Hospitable people are aware that the kindness they show to any one person, at anytime over the course of their life, may be the kindness that they show to an angel, as the Apostle wrote in Hebrews.

I love people who make it their effort to give all their money away and tend to be habitually broke. Not broke because they don't have an adequate job. Rather, they are broke because they have recognized God's abundance and blessing. Their lifestyle has benefited, often greatly. But now they are giving it back to society, to the poor, the sick and the less fortunate. People who give are some of the happiest people I know. Because they know that even the most modest, simplest gifts can change a life.

I like being around people who are sexually modest. I don't want to share in your sexuality; neither do I want to invite others into this aspect of my personal life. This might explain why I get nervous when the topic is raised casually. Sexuality is a gift from God, but it is not meant to be worn on the sleeve, to be spoken of crudely, or to be a source of titillation. The faith community is strongest when it embraces monogamy, fidelity, and the secrets of two brought together by God's whisper.

Finally, I am most content when I'm surrounded by people who share the same love for Jesus Christ as I do. He is my Lord, and I am his disciple. I'm not going to surround myself with a crowd who is going to drag me down and tempt me to do things I'd later regret. I need to be with people who love and follow Jesus. They are the ones who have so much to teach me. I want to follow their example. And I want to set a good example for faithful living for others to follow, too. When we share a common love for Christ, what can others do to us?

Nothing.

When we share Christ, we will be humble. We will be loving. We will be hospitable. We will be giving. We will be modest. We will be as one in the Body, this the Body of Christ.

So take your place at the banquet.

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Have no worry; you will be exalted.

Take your place at the banquet.

There is room for everyone, who with a humble and loving heart approach the table..

Take your place at Christ's banquet, once all others have been invited and taken their place before us. Taste and see the goodness of our Lord. Amen.

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