

Christian Humility

Luke 14:1, 7-14

14 On one occasion when Jesus^{Ἰησοῦς} was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

⁷ When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸ “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, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

¹² 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 and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

This is a very straight-forward parable, Jesus tells at the meal.

He is addressing human nature.

Jesus tells the guests about themselves and the behaviors he observed.

His parables were full of timeless truths that we continue to learn from.

So, the guests wanted the best seats.

I guess that’s why we have assigned seating at weddings.

Avoid those awkward situations where we have to say you can’t sit with us.

Wedding etiquette may have changed, but human nature hasn’t.

We still have a tendency to want to put ourselves first.

To have a place of honor.

What happens in the workplace may be the perfect example.

I’ll pick on myself.

I had a job as a factory security guard at large plant with multiple buildings.

There were probably about 20 guards.

So, I had a decent number of direct co-workers.

The manager started something new.

An employee of the month award.

This was great! Finally, some recognition for a job well done.

The winner would have their picture on the wall and more importantly, would receive a \$50 Visa gift card!

The first few months I was happy about this opportunity to recognize co-workers.

I thought about who was doing a great job and I voted for someone each month.

After a while I noticed that it seemed like the same couple of people always won.

This started to irritate me, and I wondered if I would eventually win.

Then something happened...

I assisted an employee in the parking lot who was having a domestic issue.

I had to call the police.

I even had to go to court as a witness.

Surely now I would be the employee of the month! Nope.

Someone else won the award.

I was so annoyed that I started voting for myself every month.

I never did win that employee of the month award.

I was trying to sit in the place of honor.

The managers said no, you're not winning this popularity contest.

In retrospect, I wish I would have kept voting for other people, and not worried about what I thought I deserved.

I think we can probably all relate to times in the workplace where we tried to put ourselves first.

Maybe it worked out and you got the recognition.

Or maybe like me, you felt unappreciated, and thought people should recognize you.

Either way, we are the guests trying to sit in the place of honor at the banquet.

Jesus wants us to be humble, to sit in the low place.

Let others recognize us, rather make a rush for the best seats.

We may never be the employee of the month.

We need to accept that, and maybe see the blessing of not being popular.

Jesus certainly was not popular among the religious leaders.

Most of them probably wouldn't have considered him to be one of themselves.

They were the elite; he was some carpenter from Nazareth without any training.

Jesus didn't care what they thought of him.

He was not the rabbi of the month.

Jesus was humble.

We should learn the lesson of humility.

Though we are humble we need to make sure that it is true humility, not acting.

In his commentary on Luke, Fred Craddock warns, "The human ego is quite clever and, upon

hearing that taking a low seat may not only avoid embarrassment but lead to elevation to the

head of the table, may convert the instruction about humility into a new strategy for self-

exaltation. Jesus does not offer a divinely approved way for a person to get what he or she wants.

Taking the low seat because one is humble is one thing; taking the low seat as a way to move up is another.”

So, let’s not put ourselves last, in a manipulative way so others will put us first.

Our motives matter.

Each section of Jesus’ parable is about humility.

The first section is the most obvious.

Verses 12 through 14 are about when we are the host rather than the guest.

If we invite our friends and family, or rich neighbors, we will be repaid because they will invite us to dinner as well.

This is how most of us arrange our social events.

I don’t think there’s anything wrong with this.

Jesus is pointing out our human nature.

We want to choose those closest to us, as well as people we would like to become friends with, to be our guests.

The friendship or the family time is the reward.

Even though this is fine we shouldn’t think that this counts as Christian hospitality.

This is just mutually beneficial relationship.

Jesus, ever the revolutionary, says we should instead invite those who cannot repay us.

He says when you give a banquet invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

You will be blessed because they cannot repay you.

Jesus says you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

This can be a challenge for us.

I think our context is also somewhat different.

We may each know someone who fits any of the categories that Jesus mentions.

Our society is a little different than the first century, when any of those things would have left a person completely dependent on others.

I think to modernize our guestlist we should invite the homeless, drug addicts, the mentally ill, or even people who are so different from us that we feel like we don't have anything in common.

Maybe people we don't like, who irritate us.

This is very difficult.

I have rarely followed what Jesus says in these verses.

The closest thing I can think of is near the end of high school I became friends with a younger kid who I actually found kind of annoying.

Ok, really annoying, if I'm being honest.

He was a friend of a friend, so at first, I only hung out with him with my other friend.

But then we became friends, even though I still found him annoying.

He was more of the loud, hyperactive type, pretty much the complete opposite of me.

But I allowed this friendship to develop.

I would say we're still friends now, even though we live in different states and don't have regular contact.

This is the closest I can say that I have ever been to having the kind of guest that Jesus suggests.

I have never invited a homeless person to my house.

I might give them money on occasion, but I have never asked them to dinner.

Jesus is really challenging us at the end of this parable.

I don't think many Christians put this into practice.

We still mostly just invite the people we like over to our house.

Maybe, like me, you have a friend who secretly annoys you and you invite them over.

That's still not quite what Jesus has in mind here, although I suppose we're at least on the right track.

We could have told the person that we found them annoying, and we didn't want to be their friend.

So, I think we're on the right track, but Jesus wants us to take it to the next level.

I don't know how many of us are ready for that.

I don't think I'm ready for that.

But I want to get to that place where I can literally invite anyone to dinner.

The same goes for church too.

We shouldn't just invite our friends and people who are similar to us.

We should invite anyone and everyone.

I'm not there yet either.

I still am only likely to invite people I know who I think would want to be here.

People who would fit in.

Honestly, I really don't invite people to church all that much at all.

I think most of us mainline types tend to feel like religion is a private matter.

I don't want to bother people; I just assume they have a church they go to if they want to go.

And if they don't go to church, it's because they don't want to.

Well, maybe they would if they were invited.

Let's take a chance inviting people.

We might feel uncomfortable at first, but let's just try it.

If we get into the habit of inviting people to church, pretty soon before you know it, you'll be inviting anyone and everyone.

I think we just need to get started.

Whether it's inviting people to dinner or to church, or anywhere.

We don't put as much emphasis on community in our society anymore.

Over time we have become more isolated, and I'm sure the pandemic didn't help.

We get used to being in our own little unit.

We don't even have guests over much at all.

I'm preaching to myself right now, just so you know.

We're so far behind on having the kind of banquet Jesus tells us to that right now I think he'd be happy if we just start somewhere.

We need to build community again.

Go ahead and start somewhere easy, so that you actually make progress.

Don't see yourself as failing to follow Jesus' example.

See it as an opportunity to grow.

Jesus invites you to invite others.

Let's start small, but don't limit yourself.

Maybe have a family reunion.

Do people still do those?

I know, Jesus said don't invite your family.

Well maybe that's where you need to start.

Maybe your first banquet will be a family reunion.

Then maybe your second banquet will look more like a meal hosted by Dorothy Day at her hospitality house.

She wrote in her magazine, the Catholic Worker, about taking care of the poor.

Then poor showed up.

Instead of turning them away she created a place for them.

Now the Catholic church is considering her for sainthood.

Although, when asked about this near the end of her life, she said she hoped they wouldn't make her a saint, she said she didn't want to be wrote off so easily.

Jesus calls us to humility.

Not only should we take the lowest seat, but we should also be hosting those who the rest of society ignores.

The first part is easier than the second part.

If Jesus had stopped at verse 11, we would say, ok I can do that.

It's not that difficult.

But Jesus always takes things a step further.

He always invites us to get out of our comfort zone.

We may be tempted to skim over verses 12 through 14 and say, oh ok, just be humble. Got it.

We should not do that.

Instead, we should acknowledge that we have a lot further to go.

Don't be discouraged by this.

See it as an opportunity to welcome others, to our table, and to the kingdom of God.

