

Luke 14:1, 7-14

There are two kinds of families in this world - those that sit in the **same place** at the kitchen table for nearly every meal, and those that **change** things up from day to day. I think most families fall into the **first** category. Perhaps you can **relate** to this kind of situation - there is **dad's** chair and **mom's** chair and the **oldest** child's chair and the **next** oldest child's chair and so on ... and if anyone is sitting **out of place** for a particular meal, they are in **trouble** as soon as the other person shows up. Interestingly enough, the same thing generally holds true for seating spots in **church** too. We all tend to have our preferred **spot**, where we end up sitting every week, and we're probably not too pleased if somebody else gets there first. But, this morning we are going to spend some time discussing **A Place At God's Table**. First of all Jesus wants us to know about our **own** place at God's table, and then He also wants us to know about the place at the table, which we're able to offer to **others**.

As our text begins we find Jesus eating at the house of a prominent **Pharisee**. That's **not** a place we would expect to **find** Jesus. After all, the Pharisees were a group of religious leaders who were completely intent **discrediting** Jesus. And in fact, that's exactly what they were trying to do at this particular **gathering**. They were carefully **watching** Jesus to see if there was some way they could trip Him **up**, or accuse Him of some kind of **wrongdoing**, and in the process, **destroy** His **credibility** and His **ministry**. Of course as it turns out, they were once again going to be very **disappointed** because they were going to have the tables **turned** on them. Just as **they** were carefully watching **Jesus** to see if He would do anything wrong, **Jesus** was carefully watching **them** as well.

As He **watched** them, Jesus **noticed** something about their actions - something which was very **prideful** and **self-serving**. When it came time for the meal to be served, the guests were all interested in choosing the places of **honor** for themselves - the places which were closest to the **host** of the dinner. Those were the places which held the highest **status**. Jesus noted the way those men were all **scrambling** to get the **best seats**, thus revealing the sinful **pride** which was in their hearts. It was the perfect opportunity for Jesus to tell the Pharisees the **parable** which we have before us this morning, because it speaks about the **Christian** attitude which is the direct **opposite** of **sinful pride** - namely, Christ-like **humility**.

This is also a parable that **we** need to hear, just as much as those **Pharisees** did. How many times don't we find ourselves scrambling for the **best seat** at the

table? I'm not talking about the **dinner** table, or the comfiest seat in the **living room**, but rather, I'm talking about the times when we take on an **attitude** that says, "Look at **me**. I'm **better** than those **other** people. I'm something **special**." That's sinful **pride**, and we **all** have it. It doesn't even have to be so **blatant** either. There are simply those times when we get **upset** because nobody seems to give us the **recognition** we deserve - nobody seems to **thank us** for all the **hard work** we put in. Now certainly, it's always **nice** to be appreciated, but is that really **why** we work so hard - so people will **notice** us - so people will **gush** over us with **thanks**? There are also those times when our sinful pride even blames the **LORD**. We think, "I **deserve better** than what I am getting in life. I put in my **time**. I work **hard**. I try to do what's **right**. And it seems like **everybody else** is better off than I am. That's **not fair**. Why do You do this to me, Lord?" Pride always boils down to thinking we are **more important** than we really are, or thinking we **deserve more** than we really do.

So, it's for pride-filled hearts like **ours** that Jesus tells this parable, "*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. If so, the **host** who **invited** both of you will come and say to you, 'Give **this man** your seat.' Then, **humiliated**, you will have to take the **least** important place. 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 your fellow guests. For everyone who **exalts himself** will be **humbled**, and he who **humbles himself** will be **exalted**."*

**Humility** begins by recognizing what seat we **deserve** at God's table - and that's a **non-existent** seat. God has told us to "*Love the Lord your **God**, with **all** your heart, with **all** your strength, and with **all** your mind,*" and we have **failed**. God has told us to "*Love your **neighbor** as yourself,*" and again, we have **failed**. When we look at our lives in the mirror of **God's law**, it doesn't take long to realize we don't deserve **any** place at God's table. And yet, our gracious God has **given** us a place. He doesn't leave us in the lowly position of **sinners** who deserve to be condemned to **hell**. He lifts us **up**, and gives us an **honored** place at **His** table. He doesn't do it because He is so **impressed** with us and our **godliness**. He does it **only** because of the work of His Son, **Jesus**. That's the **point** of the parable in our text today. Whenever effective **exalting** takes place, it is **God** who does the exalting, **not** us. If we try to lift up **ourselves** because we think we are **more deserving** than others, it can only end in **dishonor** and **disgrace**. But if we come to God and **humbly** recognizing our **sinfulness**, He will lift us up with **forgiveness** for our sins, bringing us **peace** and **joy**.

This is the Christian attitude of **humility**, and it's an attitude which results in **action** on our part, because a humble **heart** leads to humble **hands** of **service**. Jesus spoke about that in the **advice** He gave to the Pharisee in the last part of our text where He said, "*When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your **friends**, your **brothers** or **relatives**, or your rich **neighbors**; if you do, they may invite you **back** and so you will be **repaid**. But when you give a banquet, invite the **poor**, the **crippled**, the **lame**, the **blind**, and you will be blessed. Although **they** cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the **resurrection** of the righteous.*" Jesus pointed out the difference between being **self-serving** and being **selfless** in the way we serve. It's always going to be **easier** to invite someone to a dinner, if we know we're going to be receiving an invitation from **them** in return. But Jesus told the Pharisees and us, that we should be more interested in serving those who **can't** repay us - the **poor**, the **crippled**, the **lame**, and the **blind**. He wants us to focus on where we can be the **most helpful** to others, rather than on being **repaid** or **rewarded** for the things we do.

Serving those who are less fortunate than **we** are is humility in **action**. When we serve others with no expectation of receiving an earthly **reward** of any kind, we're doing the same kind of thing **Jesus** did during His time here on the earth. Much of His time was spent among the **down-casts** of society - those whom others referred to as **sinners** - like the tax-collectors and prostitutes. **He** viewed them as sinners **too** - sinners who were **hurting** and who needed **forgiveness**. Jesus was always willing to go the extra mile in order to **help** those who were hurting - regardless of whether their hurt was **physical** or **spiritual**. Jesus always showed great **humility**. He was the **almighty** and **sinless** Son of God, but He never held it over people's heads. He never thought of Himself as being **too good** to carry out the **inglorious** task of **suffering** and **dying** on our behalf. But rather, He **humbly** carried out the heavenly Father's **will**, and brought the forgiveness of **sins** to **all** people, and eternal **salvation** to all who would humbly put **their** trust in **Him**.

We have the opportunity to **share** that same kind of **selfless** love with the people around us. That means giving of our **time**, our **talents**, and our **treasure** to help out those who really **need** it. The people who are in **need** are all around us. We can give of our **time** by **visiting** those who are **sick**, or those who are **homebound**, or those who are being cared for in a **nursing home**. We can bring **God's Word** to them, along with a little friendly **conversation**. We can give of our **talents** by **teaching** our children and grandchildren about their Savior; or by **singing** or playing an **instrument** in the church choir; or by trimming **bushes**, or pulling **weeds**, or watering **plants** to make our church property more **beautiful** and

**welcoming** to everyone. And we can give of our **treasure**, as we regularly bring our free-will **offerings** for the work of the Lord through our **congregation**, and as we provide additional **financial** and **prayer** support for our various **Missions of the Month**.

But, if we're looking for a big **reward** for our service, we might not see it for a while. There **is** a reward. and it's **greater** than any kind of earthly **recognition** or pat on the back that we might **expect** to receive. Jesus said, "*Although **they** cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the **resurrection** of the righteous.*" Our **reward** is in **heaven**. Our reward is **not** heaven itself - that's a free **gift** which has been **given** to us by Jesus. But rather, when we are **in heaven**, our **reward** will be the words of our Savior, "***Well done, good and faithful servant.***" Until that day, let's be filled with an attitude of deep **humility**, recognizing just how **blessed** we are to have been given **A Place At God's Table**. And let's be willing to offer that place to **others** too, as we tell them about the **Savior** who has made it all possible. Amen.