



Lectionary 22, Year C

Bishop Tim Graham, Indiana-Kentucky Synod

12th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Luke 14:1, 7-14

Luke 14:1, 7-14

¹ 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.

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.”

SERMON TEXT:

Years ago, I came across a story that has stuck with me. A CEO of a Fortune 500 company was traveling to his wife's hometown when they decided to stop at a gas station. While he went inside to pay, he noticed his wife engaged in a lively discussion with the attendant who pumped the gas. Curious about their conversation, he asked her as they were leaving. She smiled and shared, "I knew the man; in fact, I used to date him." The husband, feeling confident, chimed in, "I bet I know what you were thinking. You must be glad you married me, a Fortune 500 CEO, instead of him!" With a playful grin, she replied, "Actually, I was thinking that if I had married him, he'd be the CEO, and you would be the service station attendant."

Many spouses might warmly agree with that sentiment, "Amen?"

Arrogance often embodies pride at its worst, when one person or group believes themselves superior to others. Conversely, self-abasement or self-loathsomeness occurs when someone feels unhealthily inferior. In both situations, we make judgments about worthiness, belonging, and the capacity for love.

Humility exists in the middle of this spectrum, providing balance. It involves recognizing that we are neither better nor worse than anyone else, and it entails understanding our relationship with God and our companion human beings.

God alone is God; God is one, the creator and source of all life and breath. We are to have no other gods before God. We must fear, love, and trust God above all else. The humility instilled in us

by the Holy Spirit enables us to embrace this relationship with God, affirming that God is God, and we are not.

This belief also helps to put our relationship with our human siblings into perspective. If God is the Creator, then we, all of us, are the created. The creation cannot be greater than the Creator. Additionally, the Creator did not create the creation to be better or worse than one another. The creation was made in equality with each other. Each person is fully created by God and in God's likeness. We are not better or worse than any other person in God's creation.

This is true humility: understanding the dynamics of our relationship to God, the Creator, and to people, the Creation. Today's readings—Proverbs 25:6-7, Psalm 112, Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16, and Luke 14:1, 7-14—emphasize the importance of humility.

In the parable told by Luke, Jesus directly criticized those who vied for the prime spots at the banquet. He warned those who seemed to think that their honor depended on being seated above everyone else. How often do we compete for status, aspire to prestigious titles, and strive for top positions, all to demonstrate to others that we've achieved success?

Why do we so readily assume that if we don't make an effort to showcase our work, highlight our significance, and position ourselves where we can be noticed, others will misjudge our standing in God's kingdom?

Why do we persist in belittling, neglecting, and discounting others to achieve our goals? We often hear that pride leads to downfall and that arrogance comes before a fall. Jesus frequently stated that those who seek to be exalted will face humiliation, while the humble will be elevated.

Maybe a better question is, why do we still struggle to trust that God has not overlooked us and that our being, our presence, and our contributions to God's work on earth will become evident in God's time and plan? Why do we need to lift ourselves up, especially at the expense and humiliation of others? We're not any different than the people who built the Tower of Babel and thought they could be closer to God on their own merits!

Yet, at the core of our belief and faith is that God saved the world and all its inhabitants alike through the salvific act of Jesus...by grace through faith. We don't have anything to do with that decision or how and why God loves everyone and saves the world! We know that God loved the world through Jesus' redeeming and humbling act on the cross.

Paul reminds us of this in his letter to the church in Phillipi:

- ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
- ⁶ who, though he existed in the form of God,
 - did not regard equality with God
 - as something to be grasped,
- ⁷ but emptied himself,
 - taking the form of a slave,
 - assuming human likeness.
- And being found in appearance as a human,

⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

I love this because Jesus didn't use his "God card," even though he could have. That would have cheapened his position, don't you think? Yeah, God the Father, this God the Son, and I don't want to die a human death, so I'm going to abstain from this since I'm God also. No, Jesus didn't use his equality with God as a trump card to be exploited at his convenience. In fact, he emptied himself; he humbled himself to the point of death, even on the cross.

The concept of cheap grace is often mentioned when discussing God's grace without repentance and change, or when it dismisses the significance of Christ's sacrifice. Similarly, God's grace can be devalued by humans who decide who is saved by grace. This grace that we share and proclaim is not subject to human entitlement and discretion; rather, it is generously bestowed upon us and the world by our God, who sees our hearts and knows exactly who we are. God is aware that we are all sinners at our core, and the moment we justify ourselves over others is precisely when God's grace is cheapened as well.

We often feel compelled to give in order to receive something in return. However, Jesus taught that this mindset should not only be changed but completely overturned. In our society, it's common to invite friends and wealthy individuals to benefit from their reciprocation. Yet, in God's eyes, the standards are different; we should extend kindness to those who are unable to repay us, as this will lead to rewards and honor when God's kingdom is fully

realized on earth after the resurrection of the righteous. Therefore, Jesus encouraged us to invite the poor, disabled, and those in need to our feasts. This practice guarantees God's blessings.

Furthermore, as the author of Hebrews shares, this emphasis on mutual love and hospitality in all our relationships, including marriage, challenges us not only to give but also to remain content with what we have, trusting that God will provide for our needs. The reminder that God will never leave us motivates us to build relationships and commitments with confidence and grace. The call to remember our leaders and emulate their faith encourages us to remain grounded in our beliefs and draw inspiration from these exemplary figures.

In light of these truths, let us embrace Christ's invitation and trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance to live by these principles of mutual love, unwavering trust, and committed relationships. By doing so, we honor our own faith but, more importantly, the gift of grace and inspiration for those who would follow and come to know Christ Jesus our Lord. Because of what God has displayed through the crucified and risen Lord, our actions affirm that faith is not merely a belief but a transformative force that shapes our lives and the lives of others.

Friends, let us move forward boldly, nurturing relationships rooted in love while allowing the steadfast guidance of God to illuminate our paths. Together, we are called to cultivate a community that embodies God's love and grace, demonstrating that through faith, hope, and love, we can live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the sake of the world. Thanks be to God! Amen.

The peace of Christ be with you always! And also with you!

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