



Sermon Series: “A Visit to the Good Physician”

“Eating: Humility and Hospitality”

Preaching Text: Luke 14:1, 7-14

1 September 2013: 15th Sunday after Pentecost

FUMC of Arlington, Texas 76011

Sometimes a person trying to help another accidentally instills a sense of shame in the other. When people do us a favor, we feel as if we do not deserve it or we feel a sense of being devalued—however unintended. Thus as we explore Luke 14 we ask: “How can we offer Christian hospitality and at the same time allow those who receive a preservation of pride?”

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 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” (Luke 14:1, 7-14).

Luke’s story continues Jesus’ sayings about entry into God’s realm. The Pharisees “were watching him closely”—perhaps as closely as the media watches Johnny Manziel. Jesus’ dinner host is a prominent Pharisee and Jesus tells “a parable” about table manners in God’s realm. The elect at the end of time was a common theme and the example was a “wedding feast.” And although the message centers on good manners, Jesus concludes that an invitation to God’s realm depends solely on God. In other words, the Divine is not fooled by human self-promotion!

Further, for although the first century cultures, both Jewish and Greco-Roman, frequently slighted the “poor,” Jesus’ parable prompts all believers to share with them!



This notion basically means that giving to those unable to “repay” imitates the way God wants “kingdom people” to relate. For the Pharisee- leader, this seems to be a genuine surprise.

Still our questions stands: “How can we offer Christian hospitality and at the same time allow those who receive a preservation of pride?” Jesus teaches us: “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled . . .” Yet how we carry this request out is significant.

For Luke meals enact a powerful metaphor for God’s dominion. In Luke/Acts there are no fewer than forty references to “eating” or “at the table.” Perhaps Luke uses the table so Jesus can personally teach apart from the crowds. Luke lets us peek in on an intimate moment as guests jockey for positions of honor. After Jesus noted “how the guests chose the places of honor,” he told a parable. This parable guides us about how to share.

Regarding sharing one insight this parable offers is the method by which a person offers assistance to another may be as important as the assistance itself. When someone is on the giving end of a gift, it is often easy to make the recipient feel not so much gratitude as embarrassment—or even shame.

Examples abound for us about this principle of reciprocity. A pastor friend had a daughter who got married. The bride’s family received many, many gifts from a large congregation. But rather than feel gratitude, my friend instead felt shame. Why? Because he had never bought a single wedding present for any family in his congregation and felt he should reciprocate the people’s kindness.

In part this is what Jesus’ parable addresses. Jesus first speaks about the choosing of seats of honor. We strive to sit in important places—to see and be seen. Yet Jesus said that it is better for someone to ask that person to “move up higher” than to be asked to give a seat to someone worthy of more honor. Of course in the ancient world honor and shame dictated conduct. Jesus then offers up gospel wisdom: “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be



exalted.” When people attempt to self-create honor, then their endeavor is doomed.

Jesus recognizes the human desire for competition, whether for honor or wealth, at the parable’s closing. Then Jesus shows disciples how to be truly generous in God’s realm. Jesus directs his words to the host, but all attending paid rapt interest to his words.

In our give and take world we offer hospitality to those capable of returning the favor. Christmas gifts often are not considered based on relationship, but rather on what is likely to be an aptly reciprocal gift. When someone offers too lavish a gift, it may introduce tension into a relationship. Lavish gifts may also create the shameful feelings that my pastor friend felt regarding his daughter’s wedding gifts from parishioners.

Instead of showing honor by bestowing invitations (or gifts) on those who can without question repay such a debt, Jesus tells the host to “invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.” In other words, the gift’s motive should not be based on some sort of reciprocity, but rather on what the gift contributes to the recipient’s wellbeing.

At Thanksgiving or Christmas, for example, sometimes people of genuine good will unintentionally give gifts in ways that shame the poor. In God’s realm there is a better way.

I remember reading about a man who had a large bag of aluminum cans. He stopped and offered them to a visibly underprivileged fellow gathering cans along a highway. He refused the cans saying, “I don’t need no charity.” So over the next hill the man with the cans pitched them into the ditch. Later as he returned near the same place, he noted that the cans had been picked up—every can. In this way the gift was given and the pride persisted intact.

You may say just cans, but nonetheless—it was a fine gift justly given. Amen.