



Hear the Word

from Marvin Kananen

Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

September 1, 2019

Humility

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Good Morning! Happy Labor Day weekend, a 3 day weekend.

The pastor, a man of theology, is gone today.
He let the English major speak.
I don't do theology, I just do story.

Let us then consider the story that we've just heard.

The first verse of the Gospel text has Jesus
going into the den of those who hate him,
Into the house of the leader of the Pharisees,
to eat the meal.
And the key phrase, "**They were watching him closely.**"

Our text today then jumps to verse 7,
but I think those skipped 5 verses add a lot to the story.

Don't miss what's happening.
Paraphrasing the verses, and remembering he was being watched as they sought for anything by
which they could claim to be fault upon him,
Jesus purposely gave them what they wanted.

In verse 2, there was a man with "**dropsy.**" Something that today we call "**edema,**" the **accumulation of fluid**, often in the ankles and feet.
Jesus asked those Pharisees, "May I heal him? Is it lawful?"
But they said nothing. Silence was their answer.
So Jesus healed the man with edema and sent him away.

Then he turned to those who refused to say anything,
even though it was a healing, and
Jesus asked them, "if it was your child, would you save him?
Or your ox that fell into a well on the Sabbath, would you not pulled it out?"

Of course they would, but apparently they said nothing.
Again they stood and merely watched him,
judging him according to their standards.

Back to our reading, verse 7. I love verse seven;
for as they who were “watching” him
they were themselves being watched.

That thought has always worried me,
Jesus watching me, hearing my words. Oh, I should panic.
I don't. I should. We all should.

Jesus, he watched them. It reads “**When he noticed** how ...,” he was observing them and their
behavior. The judges were being evaluated.

They were not at a wedding, they were at Sabbath,
The meal before the Sabbath.

It would not have been a wedding.

The parable was of a wedding.

It was then he began telling them a parable,
A teaching story,
And the form of their judgment comes in a story.
Jesus and the Pharisees were not at a wedding.

He'd observe them at the meal choose their own seats.

His story began with this thought:
“When they invite you to a wedding,
Do not expect to take the highest seat?”
These Pharisees all knew the powers of their day,
They all moved and tried to figure out,
culturally and politically,
how high dare they try to sit at the “high table.”
Remember, Jesus was speaking of a wedding banquet;
They're not really at a their wedding.

In our American culture,
we keep the “High Table” reserved for selected people,
basically the bride and groom and the wedding party.

In other cultures,
as here in the Bible story,
you honor the leadership.

It does not matter that the role of the bride and groom
and the wedding party is diminished.

This is not an easy story to communicate
unless you have a living participant.

Jean, have you a story?

In a culture like we had in Tanzania, Jean accidently sat at the
“high table,” even if she didn't know what she was doing,

This was a signal to the people that she
had the right, power, and authority to sit there.
Because they didn't know who she was,
they were hesitant to approach her.
Bless Janet for saying, "Mama Jean, come."

That's a funny story.
But imagine if Jean felt she had a right to be there,
They may not have had the nerve to move her.
That's the ego set that Jesus was facing.

Where you sit,
when you are seated,
and when you arrive
Are often roles that those in leadership flaunt
Just to show others their status.
One of the stories Jean advised me not to tell was this,
a certain bishop we knew
would often show up an hour late to a church service, graduation, etc.
because he knew they wouldn't dare to begin
until he got there.
He'd have been the kind of person
Jesus observed taking the higher seat.

When Jesus spoke,
he addressed all the Pharisee-types who were there.
He gave them a definition with his words,
he was trying to point them to the way to God.
He was speaking to them of humility;
it was a concept they did not understand.
As earlier they wouldn't answer him,
Now he was showing them what they needed to know.

Which brings us to the point of this lesson.

The word Jesus was trying to teach them was this: **humility**.

Perhaps his thinking went like this:
if they're going to observe me,
maybe I can this opportunity to teach them a new idea:
humility.

You see, before Christianity,
neither the Romans nor the Greeks had a word for "**humility**."

They had several words for humiliation,
words they used to show how others could be despised,
ignoble, to be of no repute, cringing.
All their words were negative concepts in all its meanings;
it was an insulting idea.
But that is not what humility is anymore.

The ultimate example of that being what Christ showed
is his death on the cross, THAT'S HUMILITY.

Humility is a gift. It is not an insult or weakness.
It is a present that we can offer others.
It is, as AA, who apparently stole it from C.S. Lewis, says,
"It is not that we think less of ourselves
(the Greek meaning),
But that we think of ourselves less," as in less often.

The very concept of humility was so foreign
to the Pharisees way of thinking
they had no term to describe it.
It was incomprehensible to them;
why would anyone ever want to sit low on the high table? To them, it was like having a first-
class ticket on the airplane,
and then taking a seat back in steerage. Why?

Well, when the steward on the airplane walks up to you and says, "Excuse me, you are sitting in the
wrong seat. Please, let me take you up to first-class," the reaction will be far more polite than being
told to get out of first-class and go to the back of the plane with Marvin.

The Pharisees could not have understood why anyone would willingly take a lower seat, because the
lower seat was humbling.

In fact, the word "humility" is not in any literature outside the Bible before the second century. It is a
word that originated in the New Testament, and it stood in reverse of everything that came before it,
it suddenly has a positive connotation.

It is a word and concept that changed the world.

Humility of mind and spirit is the opposite of pride. Pride has always been one of the sins that has
separated us from God. Christ through the power of His Blood has transformed the word humble.
Where once it was understood as shame in the eyes of man, until now Humility carries glory,
strength and honor. It is exalted in the eyes of our Lord.

It's only a word, but it's a Christian word that never existed before. You can find it used three times in
the Psalms, but it's the old negative use of the word.

Humility is not being timid or afraid. It is not groveling, nor is it self-abasing, a lack of pride or
worth. Humility is what you do for the sake of others. Often here in the church, we see that humility
is the willingness to serve others and not be served.

It is the difference between self-praising and being honest. It is honest, self-knowledge, and love all
wrapped into one.

And, incidentally, It isn't that kind of pride that the first bishop I mentioned flaunted, knowing that
they would wait for him. The new bishop has always arrived early. That's humility.