**Sermon for**

**Sunday 1st September**

**2019**

 **Luke 14.1 7-14**

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***Reading 2, New Testament:*** Luke 14.1,7-14

**Humility and Hospitality**

14 On one occasion when Jesus[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+14%3A1%2CLuke+14%3A7-14&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25547a)] was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

7When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. 8“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9and 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. 10But 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 honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

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

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**Audio/Visual Sermon link.**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/sw6hzin9eu67opt/G.Roach%20Sermon.MP4?dl=0>

***Sermon:***

When I was given this verse to preach on, I was nothing short of very humbled yet quite worried. ***Humbled because*** as someone who follows Benedictine spirituality ***humility*** is very much the key word to the Benedictines it is something that I reflect on often, it is written within my spiritual rule, it is also something I try and teach my children about frequently. So, humility as a moral and spiritual standard and as a spiritual tool is something, I hold very close to me, despite it being something I fail at often.

***And worried*** because I didn’t want to do this sermon with all its moral and spiritual potential any injustice, especially in front of so many wonderful and devoted Christian brothers and sisters.

This subject, much like all preaching, is a great responsibility and humility is the key word to our reading today, but what is humility, and does it tie into our lives as modern Christians?

***“Humility is the quality of having a modest or lower view of yourself before others”*** ~ defined by the oxford English dictionary.

And according to the ***knowing Jesus website humility is mentioned around 73 times within the Holy bible.*** It is a re occurring theme with the saints throughout the ages and it is the theme that so many spiritual rules are made from, the rule of Saint Francis, the rule of the master, the rule of Saint benedict but to name a few, not to mention personal spiritual rules of countless devoted Christians the world over.

Humility is also a moral standard I feel we are lacking in today’s society, because we are constantly fed messages in media, magazines and other sources that say…

***“You are more important, you are worth more, you are better than him or her and deserve better”***

Brothers and sisters, we as the scriptures say, are called to be not of the world, not of this standard of selfish pride but of other standards, a higher heavenly standard of humility and love. ***Of G-dly humility and love.***

So, I think it is safe to say that humility is pretty much a vital attribute to Christians of all places, people, countries and denominations.

So, we know what humility is and that it is relevant to us so let us now open up the scripture reading for today. But in order to do so I’d like to look at verse 11 first where Jesus states that…

*“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”*

Jesus in this line lays the foundations for the keys to understanding our verse and for understanding Gods will for us in this life, that we must humble ourselves so that he, the Lord G-d can exalt us. Because it is only through humility can we see the Lord.

The great spiritual author and Jesuit Priest Anthony De Mello (I highly recommend his books) speaks of us as humans ***“having a deep sense of selfish pride”*** that we, deep down inside, don’t ***really want*** to repair, because within us all we have this sense of self-importance. And it’s this pride I touch on now, it is that part within you that says

***“I am an ex teacher, doctor, I have raised kids, I am ordained (and so on) so I should know, or I should be able to do this or that…to sit there or do XYZ”***

Reflect for a moment upon your own desire to sit at the head of the table, does it happen often? Does that part crop up from time to time, it does with me, not because we are nasty people, or full of self-importance but rather because as we navigate life we become our story and sometimes we ***become a manifestation of our own pride*** and pride brothers and sisters as it says in scripture is the enemy of humility and is certainly the example of the fall of Satan. Remember Satan in his rebellion against the Lord G-d? wanted to be like G-d, better than him? His pride was his fall, as you will reflect upon in our reading.

***I pose a question to you now, who amongst us in society is humble, and I mean truly humble?*** Is it the elderly with their many years of experience? Is it the clergy or lay ministers with their wisdom? (Not me, can I add 😊). Or our teenagers?

It is our little children of course, those who don’t have the “I am, I was, I can do” sense of pride that life puts in front of us. Therefore, we must (as scripture says) be humbled like children, so that when we approach the table, we are about to read all about, we will find it more profitable to sit at the lower end rather than the head of the table.

Ok back to our reading, V1 of chapter 14…

“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.”

Now it is important to touch on who the Pharisees where within our reading. They were teachers of a religious group who separated themselves from the rest of society because the rest of society were unclean, that’s what Pharisee means ***“separated ones”*** and the primary teaching of the Pharisees was that nobody unclean can be with G-d, this being the reason they lived and taught the law of the Torah because the law of the Torah was all about cleanliness. Hence, they separated from the unclean as they effectively looked down on everyone else who wasn’t like them. This is clearly why they always clashed with Jesus, because Jesus was not to be found with the squeaky clean but was to be found around the unclean. Think about this for a moment, ***they must have hated him!*** The common dirty people called him rabbi, master, teacher, Lord, and sat with him at his feet listening to the words of wisdom that surpassed the Holy Jewish teachers, the scribes and the pharisee’s.

So Jesus was on his way to eat with those that will by way of who they are, ***will be looking down on Jesus***, waiting for him to trip up on the sabbath, (don’t forget the many rules that governed the Jewish sabbath) they will be judging others for their unclean life, and will be whispering about morals and standards, but the beauty in this line is that although…

 *“they were watching him closely”*

 ***he too was watching them, because***…

*“he noticed how they chose the places of honour”*

***They were watching him, but he was already watching them.***

When he saw this, notice, (and this is a lesson for us) that he didn’t scold them, he just loved them and recognised that they had no humility. And when he did notice this, he told them a parable…(v7)

Now by the place of honour, the guests effectively chose or were possibly arguing over who was joining the head Pharisee at the top of the table, of which would also possibly be the house owner and some official Jewish people.

Now don’t answer this but reflect upon a moment in your life where you may have thought yourself higher than others, maybe listened to or seen a situation where someone felt offended that they were not included into the “head of the Table or situation” what feelings of jealousy did this create, what feelings of anger? You see, behind this story isn’t just the example of humility, but also other deeper things that may have bubbled up in the human soul or even passing from the heart through human lips… ***hatred…envy…malice…pride.***

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V8- Jesus states in his parable…

*“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, 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.”*

What is Jesus saying here in the parable?

Here he is saying that your pride will, in all situations have the potential to bring you down, and when you come down you may come down with quite a bump, maybe with a sense of humiliation, shame or disgrace. In humiliation or shame because in life there is always, someone better than you in many areas that we live in and work in, and if our pride brings us to that place where we are made an example of or criticised, this may hurt.

But I offer to you another angle to this, as it is not only the Pharisees we should be careful of, for the Pharisees are everywhere, but it is the Lord G-d who sees all and who will see the pride that, no matter how small the situation, it morally echoes to heaven in a huge way where the Lord himself takes note of all that must be accounted for at our day of Judgement.

So, you see, the Pharisees are people to be aware of but most of all is the Lord.

I have a theory since starting ordination training. My theory is that the Pharisees still exist, and they exist almost in abundance. They exist in all areas of the church, in society and they may even be here in some capacity within the congregation before me.

This comment is not meant to offend, it meant to give food for thought…

That the Pharisees will watch your every move, they will ***whisper*** behind your back, about how you trip up, how you associate with Muslims, pagans, Jews, (Effectively the unclean) and they will tell others about what you are doing wrong and how “unbiblical” your behaviour is.

V10 *“But when you are invited (to the table, or feast, Jesus carries on), 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 honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.”*

Effectively…

***“whoa! What are you doing there? Your silly man! You under value yourself, come join me towards the top”***

This is the Lord exalting you for your humility. For you approached the situation ***like a child*** and now you are raised before the Lord and before all others in your presence.

V11 “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” ~ ***What immensely powerful words these are.***

Jesus then goes on to say as he speaks…

 *“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, (This was a very gentle dig at the Pharisees) in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid.”*

 In other words, the rich or well-off are looking after themselves again, and each other.

*“But when you give a banquet, (This is verse 13) 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.”*

At St Paul with St Luke a few years ago we ran a Monday evangelical café church called open door where the homeless, the lost, the broken, locals, men women and children where invited in to share testimony and hear the gospel over a basic meal. All were welcome but those who were mostly invited where those who had nothing to give back. I loved this style of church, though my own inner Pharisee (and this is my confession) occasionally judged those who came who were unclean, who touched the food first.

The message here is again one of humility and of hospitality. Because to keep favour with those that cannot afford riches, or food or even pay for hospitality is going to reap the bigger reward when our judgement time comes, at the “resurrection of the righteous”, though even as the resurrection of the righteous as our motivation, should our reward and motivation be more of Christian love in the example of Jesus?

Conclusion:

Your pride to run to the head of the table may be your embarrassing fall, and your need to be recognised with those that count may result in an emotional pain in this world, and more importantly a spiritual impact before the Lord.

***In all matters, sit humbly at the foot of the table***, smile, keep yourself to yourself, and your self-importance between you and the Lord, then when and if the time is right you will be raised before the Pharisees in your company and glorified in the Lord.

Amen.