

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: 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."*

A school principal received a phone call. The voice said, "Thomas Bradley won't be in school today." The principal was a bit suspicious of the voice. He asked, "Who is speaking?" The voice came back, "My father."

Today's scripture reading is filled with deception that gave Jesus an opportunity to strike back with a healthy lesson. The text begins with verse one setting the stage for what is to come later when we read verses 7-14. We read that Jesus was invited to a dinner party, on the Sabbath at the house of a leader of the Pharisees. There were other guests, likely other Pharisees, and leaders of the temple.

Luke makes a point to tell us that they all were watching him closely, signaling to us that their motivation for inviting Jesus was devious. From other occasions, we know that most of the Pharisees were not Jesus fans because Jesus was growing in popularity, because they felt he was a threat to their prestige among the Jews and that often time, his teachings contradicted their written laws. They wanted to somehow get rid of him.

So, this was a trap to capture him in saying or doing something wrong. The fact that the meal was on the Sabbath is likely another indication that this was a trap. The law stated clearly that no one was permitted to do any kind of work on the Sabbath. Without going into the details of the law, let it suffice to say, that even the smallest of efforts were considered work and should not be attempted on the Sabbath. This included cooking and serving a meal. Food for meals was prepared for the Sabbath the day before and had to be stored in a manner that kept them from needing to be cooked or even reheated on the Sabbath. The Pharisees apparently believed that the Sabbath with all of the restrictive laws associated with it was the perfect day for a set-up to catch Jesus doing something considered a breach of the law so they could arrest him.

After Luke gives us the setting, we find out through the verses that were not a part of today's lectionary text, that there was a man with an illness, dropsy, at the dinner party too. There's a good chance that the Pharisees invited the man with the ailment to the dinner as a part of their set-up to see

what Jesus would do. We can assume this because the Greek word interpreted for "watching" in the text means, "interested and sinister espionage."

The Pharisees knew all about other times Jesus healed people on the Sabbath, and they wanted to capture him doing it first-hand. The Gospels record seven stories in which Jesus healed people on the Sabbath, two of those stories are recorded in Luke's Gospel prior to this dinner party.

The story is told in verses 2-6; "Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the experts in the law and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath or not?" But they were silent. So, Jesus took him and healed him and sent him away. Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?" And they could not reply to this.

Jesus foiled their trap. His questions to them struck them deep in their hearts, and if not in their hearts, it challenged their common sense. He in essence said to them, "Let's be real, here. I can see right through your plan to trap me. It's ridiculous! You know you wouldn't allow your child or ox to drown just because it was the Sabbath. Why should this man continue to suffer when right before him is the opportunity to be healed?" They knew he was right, so they could not reply.

Jesus wasn't finished with his attempt to teach a personal lesson to those gathered around him, all of which apparently thought quite highly of themselves. He told them a parable. The lesson he wanted them to learn was on the value of humility.

The setting for the parable was a wedding banquet. He invited all to think about how and why they chose where they would sit when they gathered for the meal on that special occasion. He reminded them that they all knew there would be special seating for distinguished people at the dinner, so someone not fitting that description should not seat themselves at the distinguished guests' tables. If they did, they would likely find themselves embarrassed when the host came and asked them to move to a different place.

On the other hand, if a person deliberately sat at a place assigned to less distinguished people, and then was invited to move to the distinguished peoples' table, it would be his humility that gained him honor, among others. We read in verse 11 that Jesus said, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

I heard about a young seminary graduate who came up to the pulpit, very self-confident and smug. He was immaculately dressed. He knew he had what it took. He began to deliver his first sermon to his first church but when he started to speak, the words simply wouldn't come out. Humiliated, he burst into tears and ended up leaving the platform, obviously humbled. There were two old ladies sitting in the front row and one of them remarked to the other, "If he had come in like he went out, he would have gone out like he came in."

"For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

Humility is a key characteristic of those who follow Christ. Humility is nurtured in us when we recognize that we do not know or understand everything there is to know and understand. We do not assume the position of being "Mr. or Mrs. Know It All."

William Barclay writes, "How ever much we know, we still know very little compared with the sum total of knowledge. However much we have achieved, we still have achieved very little in the end. However important we may believe ourselves to be, when death removes us or when we retire from our position, life and work will go on just the same."

We recognize humility in us when we compare ourselves to others. We all do it; but not always in a healthy way. When I talk about comparing ourselves to others, I don't mean it as gathering of ammunition to devalue our self-worth. But as healthy comparison, if we are not puffing up ourselves

with unrealistic pride, we can see honestly that there are others who know more about some things or others who can do some things better than we can; and humbly we acknowledge there are opportunities of growth available for us. It encourages us to learn more and try new things.

Humility is nurtured as we walk side-by-side with Jesus, the ultimate example of living the good life. Looking at him we recognize our shortcomings, our unworthiness in comparison to his glory and perfection. Comparing ourselves to him, surely, our haughty pride will die and our conceit will fade.

Following the telling of this parable, Jesus turns to the man who invited him to the dinner party and confronts him on his motivation for hosting the dinner party, inviting particular guests, and him. As I mentioned earlier, the Pharisee's motivation was disingenuous and Jesus knew this. The man's efforts were not motivated by kindness or generosity. All the Pharisees and distinguished guests at that event were incriminated by Jesus' question.

Not only was their motivation to trap Jesus into doing something wrong, but it was intended to elevate their egos, to make them feel superior to others, thereby sending the message to others that they were better than most people and anyone calling their superiority into question would be dealt with in order to "put them in their place". They, in fact, by taking advantage of the authority given to them by the Jews, created images for themselves of inflated self-righteousness, even over God's authority.

Jesus was calling them into accountability before God. It is not God's way that anyone should think of themselves more highly than another; nor should anyone be made to feel like a lesser being than another. Jesus call's us to **"be real"** with ourselves and with others, recognizing that we and all people were created by God and we belong to God. His. This is who we are at the heart of our being. Being Real is grounded within us as we find ourselves in our bonded relationship with God and shaped by our obedience to God's ways.

Being real matures as we approach God always with humbleness. Approaching God, consciously or unconsciously, as one who thinks they are the authority of all the answers to life's questions, or as one who demands from God their own way, or one who in essence thinks they can trap God for one's benefit, just as the pharisees thought they could trap Jesus, is a sign of a hypocritical Christian.

Like what Jesus did to the Scribes and Pharisees at this dinner party, Jesus calls out those proclaiming Christ as their Savior today with the same hypocritical attitudes and behaviors. Jesus tells us, it is totally unacceptable! Be real, he says, allowing this realness to find its way in and through expression in our lives as we walk humbly with Jesus.

The queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, and one day she put him to the test. She brought artificial flowers so perfectly formed that no human eye could detect them from real flowers. She put them in a vase on Solomon's table, in his throne room next to his flowers. As he came in, the queen of Sheba is reported to have said, "Solomon, you are the wisest man in the world. Tell me without touching these flowers, which are real and which are artificial."

It is said that Solomon studied the flowers for a long time and spoke nothing, until finally he said, "Open the windows and let the bees come in."

There are ways to tell the artificial from the real —let the bees come in; they will know where the real is. Likewise, Jesus recognizes a hypocrite instantly. (Brooks Ramsey, "When Religion Becomes Real")

Be real! Walk, humbly with Jesus; and in doing so, you will be your true self, just as God created you to be. And you will be a blessing to others as you bring honor to God. Amen.