

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.

⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

In the name of our humble Savior, dear friends,

Sometimes people have the impression that Jesus was always hanging out with the poor and marginalized of society. That is a mischaracterization. Often in the gospels, we hear about our Savior interacting with the wealthy and the leaders of society. The truth is, all people needed to hear about sin and salvation, just the same as today. In our gospel for this morning, Jesus is at the home of a prominent Pharisee. The Pharisees, you may recall, were leading religious figures in the Jewish community. There were up to 6,000 of them throughout Israel. They were not priests, but laypeople who were strict about keeping the Old Testament law along with many Jewish traditions which they really put on the same level as God’s law. They were legalistic synagogue teachers who put pressure on people to obey all these things, which means that a proper emphasis on God’s grace and forgiveness was largely missing. They wore showy robes and phylacteries—those little boxes with Scripture in them—on their foreheads and their left arms. They were respected by the people for their devout lives and they were powerful and influential both in politics and religious life. Examples from the gospels indicate that they prized their power and their high position, thinking quite highly of themselves.

As had happened a number of times in the past, Jesus was invited to a meal at the home of one of these Pharisees. But this one was a *ruling* Pharisee, perhaps a member of Sanhedrin, the select high council. But this wasn’t simply a kind gesture. He was there so they could scrutinize him. They wanted to trick him, to trap him, and ultimately put him to death, but so far had failed. So they invited him in among them once again. And while they were watching him...he was watching them!

What Jesus saw at the meal revealed a problem with those Pharisees—a lack of humility and consideration of others. It’s a problem that is found in all kinds of people today and something our own sinful natures struggle with. It is so common for us to have messed up ideas about the value of humility and how to receive honor. So it is good for us now to take our place at the table and listen as Jesus talks about

THE HONOR IN HUMILITY

- 1. Humility is learned from the honorable Christ**
- 2. Humility considers others worthy of honor...and shows it**

Hurrying to the table, stepping in front of others to grab the good spots, rudely pushing to get near the host and maybe grab the seat of honor at his side...it wasn't a pretty picture that our Lord was witnessing. And they were always like this! At another time, Jesus said **“the teachers of the law and Pharisees...love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues (Matthew 23:6).”**

Seeing this yet again, Jesus did what he had been doing with big crowds and with the small group of his disciples. He told them a parable where those listening were to picture themselves in the story. They were to think of attending a wedding reception.

This parable was different than many because the instructions Jesus gives are not cryptic in any way. They are clear and direct: **do not take the place of honor... take the lowest place.** And he explained why. If you are aggressive and self-centered and you grab the seat of honor, you may be terribly embarrassed if there is someone else there considered a more distinguished guest and you are asked to move for them! How humiliating to be in the best seat and then have to move all the way down to the end, to the worst spot!

But a humble heart takes the lowest seat. People who feel that way and do *that* don't consider themselves better than everyone else. Jesus points out that if you were to take the lowest place, it could be that you would be honored by the host and moved up! Jesus then shares a general truth: **“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** This is recognized among people, but we also hear that it's true of God: **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)**

Humility is learned from the honorable Christ as he speaks with divine authority and instruction. Jesus taught that this was not simply an outward action—a law these legalists could follow—but the way they were to actually think and feel about others. He taught his disciples about humility, he taught the crowds, and now he tries to teach the Pharisees. True, God-pleasing humility is learned from the honorable Christ.

And there is no better example than our Savior if you want to see the *honor* in humility! With complete perfection, Jesus would later show what ultimate humility looks like in action. And the Father would show the way he connects humility and honor. Jesus' sinless life continued in the months after this dinner and then—because he was thinking of YOU first...and me...and every sinful person—the sinless Son of God humbled himself before sinful people who slandered his perfect name and tortured his human frame and subjected him to the humiliation of the murderous cross. The Christ—the Anointed One of God—humbled himself to the point of torturous death for undeserving sinners.

And what did his Heavenly Father do? **Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)** His Father honored him because of the humble sacrifice made to

pay the price of the world's sin. Jesus humbled himself and was exalted! THE HONOR IN HUMILITY is seen in the purest of ways in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

You and I may also need to be told, **“Do not take the place of honor... take the lowest place.”** Perhaps already there is an example or two from our lives running through our heads, times when we were selfish, when we were thinking of ourselves first. Even as kids, we have done this. We don't always let others go first when playing a game—because we want to! We might be angry at mom or dad because we want our way. That's selfish and not nice to our parents whom God gave to us to take care of us. Have you ever grabbed the last cookie on the plate, even though you already had one and you knew someone else didn't get one yet? Do you really believe that you own the left lane of the road? Do you just *hate* stopping for students to cross the street around the U of A, even though they have the right of way and the signs tell you so? Are you demanding and selfish around your spouse, your boyfriend or girlfriend? Is it even possible that you feel more entitled than others around church?

There are times when the wicked Pharisee in us comes out. And just like at the dinner party, Jesus is watching us. He sees the sin. I hope that today and at those times, we look back at Jesus so that we can be reminded of his humility and the forgiveness it won for these sins of ours. Then we can bow in humility before him and repent and have complete confidence that we are forgiven.

When we do that, we are then properly motivated to exercise the kind of honorable humility God wishes to see in his children. The love we have for Christ will move us to behave like Jesus told his host: **“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”**

Jesus wants us to have hearts that really want to put other people first and are not worried about getting paid back. A sure way to do that, Jesus says, is to do nice things for people who aren't in a position to pay you back! If you truly care about people as God would have you do, you won't be worried about what you get out of it or the favor that might be returned later. The unselfish love of Christ should move us to have that kind of love for Him and for others. There's no need to “keep score” when it comes to invitations to dinner or kids' birthday parties or anything else.

Think about it, if you and I actually consider others worth of honor, we will show it. This is what Jesus did for us. Do you remember these words of the Apostle Paul? **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:3-5).**

Some of you send cards or emails of encouragement or Christian love to others. You're not looking for something in return; it's just what you do. Others have difficulty saying "No" when asked to serve at church simply because you like serving others. There are actually people who think nothing of being called at 2 AM in an emergency if they can help in some way. Moms and dads and grandparents are quite often willing to put the needs of children and grandchildren above their own desires. Children remember to pray for someone else and not just for themselves. These good things happen all the time among us and they are acts of humility and they are honorable.

Jesus sees these good things that Christians do and they are pleasing to him. They are just the kind of things he wanted the Pharisees to do out of love for God. Jesus finished by saying, **"Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."** We want to be careful how we explain what Jesus says. Someone might think that if you do enough of these selfless acts, plenty of things that put others first, then God will do a good thing for you by taking you to heaven.

Knowing other things Jesus said helps to complete the picture for us. Maybe you remember how Jesus described the "resurrection of the righteous" on the Last Day. He was teaching his disciples about the separation of the "sheep and the goats," as he put it, on Judgment Day. He named off all these good things that Christians did for Jesus himself—providing food, hospitality, clothing, care when sick and even prison visits. And he says that the believers will honestly ask, *"When did we do that for you?"* And Jesus will say, **"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me (Matthew 25:40)."**

Jesus is explaining that these acts of humility and service to others receive the honor of Jesus' praise on the Last Day. Clearly believers did not do those things to earn heaven—and that could never be done because the good things we do could never pay for our sins. Jesus paid for our sins and we are saved only by faith in him. Those acts of humble service to others reveal the faith we have in God. They become so natural for us as Christians that we don't even think about it. It's just what we do. We know that it pleases God, we have seen Christ's perfect example of humility, and we adopt that same mindset that puts other people first. It is faith in action and it is not the actions that save us, but the faith in Christ that prompted those actions. It still amazes me every time I think about this, that Jesus, the perfectly humble helper of sinners, would hold up our acts of humble faith on the Last Day and consider them worthy of mentioning! That we would receive such an honor is astounding!

So you see, it's not really about doing the right things, it's really about having a Christ-like heart beating inside of you. The Pharisees were missing that and needed to have it explained to them. So did people throughout time—as evidenced by the words from Proverbs today (way before Christ) and the words of James (way after Christ). We need the reminder as well. Take your worship folder home with you today and consider these Scripture lessons throughout the week and watch for opportunities to honor Christ as you honor others. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.