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Humility and Hospitality
Luke 14:1, 7-14

On one occasion when Jesus^[a] was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

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."

I wonder what would happen if Jesus were to tell this parable at a dinner of an important person **today**?

Can you imagine Jesus saying—

be sure and take the lowest seat at the table, the worst seat in the house?

And then what if he said,

be sure and invite the lowest people in the world to your events,
the poor, crippled, blind, and lame..

don't invite anyone who can repay you...

can you imagine what people would think of Jesus?

But what about us?

What do we think of Jesus' comments? What do we DO with them?

Most of us are not celebrities or important people in the world,
but how are we, when it comes to ***humility and hospitality***?

At first glance this story makes sense.
 No one wants to be around a show off.
 But notice the context.
 Jesus has been invited to the ***home of a leader—a Pharisee,***
 And he notices how people around him are
jockeying for the best seat in the house, to be seated near the host and Jesus.

That's when he tells them the parable about being invited
 to a wedding banquet and ***not choosing the best seat*** in the house,
 lest your host moves you down a few seats.
For all who exalt themselves will be humbled,
*and those who **humble** themselves will be exalted.*

And then, he says ***don't invite your friends and important people***
 to your own dinners, invite the outcasts, the poor, the people who can never
 repay you...
 for you will be repaid in heaven.

Talk about a ***counter-cultural message!***
 Not just for today---we've been struggling with pride, forever!
 In Genesis 11:4, the people were very proud:
Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and
let us make a name for ourselves;
 And you know what happened to that ***tower of Babel?***
 God saw their pride, their arrogance, their desire to be little gods,
 And he scattered them, giving them different languages so they couldn't
 understand each other!

Why?
 Because in their pride ***they thought they didn't need God, or anyone else!***
 They thought they ***knew better*** than God.

Which is really the problem, right?
arrogance is kind of like amnesia.
 You forget God,
 And you forget that you need anyone else, right?
 Because it's all about me, myself, and I!

This is one reason the ***Book of Proverbs*** is overflowing with wisdom about pride and arrogance,
 How foolish it is.
 How it leads to pain and problems.
 Like Proverbs 16:18: pride goes before ruin; arrogance, before failure”

And yet, not only do we not listen,
 We are ***more proud and arrogant than ever before.***

David Brooks writes about morality, virtue, and humility.
 In a speech, he said, "***Fame used to be a low value.***
Now fame is the second-most desired thing in young people.
They did a study [and asked], 'Would you rather be president of Harvard or ... [or a] celebrity's personal assistant?' And of course by three to one people would rather be [a celebrity's] personal assistant."

Brian Robbins, whose company creates YouTube channels for teens and tweens, told *The New Yorker*,
 "When you speak to kids, the ***number one thing they want is to be famous.***
 They don't even know what for."

David Brooks, *The Gathering*, "The Transcript of David Brooks Talk—The Gathering 2014" (10-2-14); and Paul Roberts, *The Impulse Society* (Bloomsbury, 2014), page 140

I saw this myself on the nightly news recently
 They were showing ***a new summer camp for kids*** ---a YouTube camp!
 For \$375 they learn from older YouTube 'stars'
 how to do their own programs and channels!
 And what is the goal of the camp? You guessed it—to be famous!

One of my ***10year old nieces*** watches YouTube about how to make slime,
 and that is her goal—to have her own channel making slime!

In an interview, Brooks observed how differently we deal with promoting our own success as opposed to the past.
 He said, The day after Japan surrendered in 1945 and World War II ended, singer ***Bing Crosby*** appeared on the radio program called *Command Performance*.
 "Well it looks like this is it," he said.

"What can you say at a time like this? You can't throw your skimmer in the air—that's for a run-of-the-mill holiday.

I guess all anybody can do is thank God it's over."

In this supreme moment of American triumph they weren't beating their chests--they were ***deeply humble***.

Shortly after studying about what happened after World War II, Brooks watched a pro football game. And this is what he saw:

A defensive player doing what all professional athletes do these days in moments of personal accomplishment.

A ***victory dance***, as the ***camera focused*** in on him.

There's ***more self-celebration*** after a two-yard gain than what we heard after the United States won World War II. NPR Staff, "Take It From David Brooks: Career Success 'Doesn't Make You Happy'" NPR (8-13-15)

You know, we ***do celebrate personal success***—a lot.

In his column called *The Modesty Manifesto*, Brooks wrote: "We're an ***overconfident*** species," with a "***magnification of the self***,"

For instance:

- When pollsters ask people from around the world to rate themselves on different traits, Americans usually have the most positive self-ratings.
- 94 percent of our college professors believe they have above-average teaching skills.
- 70 percent of high school students surveyed claim they have above-average leadership skills.
- A few decades ago it would have been unthinkable for a baseball player to celebrate *himself* after hitting a home run. Today it is routine.
- The number of high school seniors who believed that they were "a very important person": in the 1950s—12 percent; in the 1990s—80 percent. David Brooks, "The Modesty Manifesto," The New York Times (3-21-11)

It's kind of like how ***EVERYONE thinks they are a good driver***—
When we all know not EVERYONE can be a good driver!

Almost all social media today is about ***how great we are, how good we look!***
Because we post what looks picture perfect, what other people might envy,

regardless of what's going on behind the scenes, right?

So what can we do?

If we are surrounded by a culture of ***self-celebration, pride and arrogance***,
how do we embrace the Christian virtue of ***humility***?
And how does humility lead to Christian ***hospitality***?

We can't assume that because we're not pop stars or famous people,
We must be humble.

NO ONE is naturally humble.

We often ***find ourselves humbled, though***, don't we?

I find this a lot lately, like with this crazy boot I'm wearing,
Even though I vainly try to do everything I used to do, so I can get out of it!

I still laugh about a pastor who was officiating at a funeral.

When he was done, he was ***asked to lead the funeral procession*** to the
cemetery. So he got into his car, and he started driving.

He flipped on his radio and became preoccupied;

About that time, ***he passed a K-Mart***,

and thought about something he needed to pick up.

So ***he turned into the parking lot.***

As he was looking for a parking space,

he just happened to glance into the ***rear-view mirror***--and saw a string of
cars following, all with their lights on!

So self-absorbed, and then so humbled.

Mary Graves, "Getting Sober for Christmas," Preaching Today, Tape No. 135.

We all find ourselves humbled from time to time, much to our chagrin.

But that's good!

We need to know our place in this world.

We need to know how to follow ***in the footsteps***

of the most ***amazing and most humble*** person ever to set foot on earth!

How do we do that, following Jesus down the path of humility?

Paul writes in ***Philippians 2:***

*Do nothing out of selfish **ambition** or vain conceit.*

*Rather, in **humility** value others above yourselves,*

*not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same **mindset** as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, **he made himself nothing** by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, **he humbled himself** by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...*

Wow! Today, apologies or self-deference are considered **weaknesses**. Our **world** is obsessed with success and strength, with who's the best, who's on top. And who is 'self-made'.

I think it was **Mark Twain** who wisely said,
"A self-made man, is like a self-laid egg".
 Ahh, isn't that true?

We need God—we need each other. End of story.
 None of us can do life on our own, nor should we!
 So what can we do?

Well, what if it all starts with ***loving and serving one another?***
 Because, we follow a ***Savior who is all about humility.***
 And ***service***, and ***love***.

I once read that ***99% of what we do to love God is actually loving our neighbor.***
Makes sense—that's how we encounter God!

This is one reason we've embraced ***loving God and neighbor***, as our ***church's mission*** statement.

Loving God MEANS loving neighbor.
 You can't have one without the other.
 Loving God is ***embodied*** by loving the people around you, by loving even strangers, even enemies.

This is what makes ***Christianity so counter-cultural***.

We want to love the people we already love.

Jesus wants us to love ALL people.

All because we love God.

But that's not easy, is it?

And we do all of this because ***God is the one who first loved us*** (I John 4).

It is the love we have ***received***, that we are able to ***give***.

We don't have the power on our own to love God and neighbors as ourselves, but with God's power in our hearts, we can.

With God's power, we can ***humble ourselves***,

and ***open our hearts and lives*** to those around us.

With God's power, we can walk in the path of ***humility and hospitality***.

You know, we do ***occasionally see models*** of humility in our world.

In June of 2014 Oscar nominated actress ***Amy Adams*** boarded a flight from Detroit to Los Angeles, when she noticed an ***American soldier*** being seated in coach. She quietly asked the airline crew permission to switch seats with the soldier, whom she didn't know.

Adams moved back to coach, and the surprised soldier,

who didn't know who had switched their seat, moved up to first class.

A reporter noticed the exchange, but Adams said it wasn't about her.

It was about our troops.

I don't know about you,

but I see ***examples of humility and hospitality in this church*** all the time.

I see the servants who without any fanfare or recognition,

keep up the building and grounds, visit the sick, send cards to shut-ins,

clean dirty carpet, fix toilets, stock the pantry,

and welcome anyone—anyone—who walks inside our doors.

Who are ***examples of humility and hospitality for you?***

How can you move in the downward direction of humility?

And how do we ***teach humility and hospitality***

to the next generation of believers?

It's sure not easy.

The great theologian **Henri Nouwen** wrote,
Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture

Henri Nouwen in the New Oxford Review (April 1987). Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 5.

Well, I wonder—what if we started letting **God use who we are,**
 and **where we've been?**

Maybe we are more inclined to humble ourselves,
 when we realize that **life has humbled us?**

Maybe we are moved to invite the lowly to dinner
 when we understand that **we are just like the lowest** of the low?

Most of us know who Charles Colson is.

He was once special counsel to President Richard Nixon from 1969 to 1973.
 He was known as Nixon's 'hatchet man'.

But during **Watergate** he was named as one of the Watergate Seven, and
 pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice.

In 1974, he was sentenced to time in the Federal Maxwell Prison in Alabama,
 as the first member of the Nixon administration to be incarcerated for
 Watergate-related charges.

But he became a Christian during the scandal,
 and his conversion to Christianity led him to start a non-profit ministry called
Prison Fellowship.

Colson once said, *The great paradox [of my life] is that every time I walk into a
 prison and see the faces of men or women who have been transformed by the
 power of the living God, I realize that the thing God has chosen to use in my life
 ... is none of the successes, achievements, degrees, awards, honors, or cases I won
 before the Supreme Court. That's not what God's using in my life.*

*What God is using in my life to touch the lives of literally thousands of other
 people is the fact that **I was a convict and went to prison.***

That was my great defeat, the only thing in my life I didn't succeed in. Chuck
 Colson, Sermon "[The Gravy Train Gospel](#)," PreachingToday.com

Isn't that **true that is in our own lives? It is in mine!**

It is humbling to offer marriage counseling,

When I've had **two failed marriages of my own.**

But maybe that's exactly what God wants to use in my life.

Lessons learned the hard way.

It is humbling to talk with people **about their kids**,
 When I have a prodigal older son....
 But maybe that's what God wants to use in my life.

What about you?

How have **you been humbled** by life?
 And how can **God use that** to help you love and serve others?

Aren't we more **inclined to humility and hospitality**
 When we realize that **we have humbly received God's grace?**
 When we realize that we have humbly received God's great **hospitality?**

See, I think **we are the ones who have been invited**
 to the great banquet of God, a feast beyond our imagination.
 And **we are the lowly who can never repay** Jesus for His grace!
 We sure didn't **earn** it.
 We sure don't **deserve** it, right?
 And yet, we have it—**God's never-ending love, mercy, and grace.**

As we come to the Lord's Table today, a table of humility—
 where Jesus literally gave his own body and blood.

We come to this table because **we CANNOT make it in this world alone**,
 and we need this food and drink for our souls.
 We need it---if we are to live out our faith
 Monday to Saturday, not just Sunday.

We come, because this is a glimpse of **our heavenly feast,**
and the kingdom of God.

There's a reason **Jesus ate with people all the time**,
 And he told so many **stories** about banquets and feasts.
 When we eat together, **walls are broken and hearts are opened.**
 We pray for that each time we take communion!

And we welcome ALL to the table---not just friends and family,
 but all people who do and want to know Jesus—

because this is God's Table, not ours,
and God's mercy and grace **NEVER run out!**

Some churches 'fence' the Table, with rules about who can partake.
We do not----because it is not our Table to fence.
We are invited by the Great Host Jesus Christ, who welcomes all.

The **way of Jesus Christ** is the way of **humility and hospitality**.
He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.
We do the same, humbling ourselves before God and one another,
Welcoming the lowly because we too are lowly,
And we have been invited to the feast.

Friends, that is the the **Good News of the Gospel**.
And for that, all God's people said, Amen.