

Sermon for Pentecost 15 (Series C)

Text: Luke 14:1, 7-14

Preached on 09-02-2007

Introduction:

Have you been to a wedding reception lately? If your summer schedule has been anything like mine, I'm sure that you've been to a few. Has this ever happened to you: You get there and then are not at all sure where you are supposed to sit? It seems like there's this unwritten rule that says the better you know the bride and groom, the closer to the front you get to sit. Obviously the wedding party sits right up there at the head table. The parents and grandparents are right up in the front as well. What about everyone else though? How do all the other guests decide where to sit? Sometimes the bride and groom make that decision for you. They put little name tags at each place. Of course that means you spend the first five minutes wandering around looking for your assigned seat. Other times, the decision is left entirely up to you. But then you're faced with a dilemma. You begin asking yourself, "Should I sit up front or stay in the back? Should I take one of the seats of honor, or leave it for someone else?"

Today Jesus helps us in deciding which seat to take. Only, He isn't talking about where to sit during a two hour wedding reception. He's advising us on how to conduct ourselves every day of our lives. By doing so...

Theme: Jesus Gives Us An Attitude Adjustment!

Part I: To Practice Genuine Humility (vv. 1, 7-11)

Part II: To Practice Unselfish Hospitality (vv. 12-14)

Part I: To Practice Genuine Humility (vv. 1, 7-11)

Jesus was at the home of a prominent Pharisee. While He was there, Luke tells us that, "**He was being carefully watched**" (v. 1). By this time in His ministry, Jesus' enemies were looking for any reason to accuse Him of wrong doing and to discredit Him before the people. So they were watching Him. While they were watching Him, Jesus was doing some watching of His own. He was watching how they selected their seats at the dinner table. Keep in mind that already at this time the Pharisees had a reputation for always fighting over seats of honor. That's why Jesus frequently warned, "**Watch out for the teachers of the law... They have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets**" (Mark 12:38-39). It was to counter this type of "me first" attitude that Jesus offered the advice He did in our

text.

He said, **“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. If so, the host...will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place”** (vv. 8-9). Now I hope you realize that Jesus was doing much more than correcting bad table manners. He was dealing with a much deeper issue. He was addressing a matter of the heart. The way the Pharisees went about grabbing the most prominent spots at the dinner table said something about how they viewed themselves. They regarded themselves as better than everyone else. They considered themselves worthy (or deserving) of places of high and distinguished honor.

Application:

Could it be that you and I are guilty of that very same attitude? Could it be that we sometimes find ourselves thinking, “I can’t believe I’m stuck here cleaning up after these kids. I’m sick of doing laundry and washing these dishes. I deserve something better!” or, “Why do I have to be stuck in this line. Can’t these people check out any faster? I have things to do. I’m an important person. Why don’t they open up another register?” My friends, do you realize how easy, how natural it is to think with a Pharisaic “me first” attitude? But to push our way into the limelight; to grab what we consider to be our just rewards, opens up the door for Satan and worldly influences to flood our hearts and minds. Before long, we start believing that we really are better than everyone else; that we truly do deserve to be praised (or recognized) for every little thing we do or give.

What does Jesus say about that kind of attitude? He says, **“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”** (v. 11). In other words, those who believe that they deserve Heaven based on what they have done or given will be thoroughly humbled before the Lord on the Last Day. When all the Pharisees of the world stand before God with puffed up conceit over their imagined self-righteousness; as a presumptuous and proud people, they will be in for quite a shock! Expecting God to praise them up and down, they will only hear Him say, **“I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from Me, all you evildoers!”** (Luke 13:27). Uh-oh! That means our arrogant and prideful attitudes have earned us nothing from God except everlasting, **“Weeping and gnashing of**

teeth” (Luke 13:28). BUT, in spite of the fact that our “me first” attitude has earned us the worst spot, God has moved us up to the best spot. He has reserved a place for us at His heavenly banquet! Because the best, possible spot is waiting for us in Heaven; earned for us by Jesus, we have no need to scramble about for the best spots here on earth. Instead, we will be content with the lower, less glamorous, more humble spots.

Transition:

Yes, *Jesus Gives Us An Attitude Adjustment!* Not only does He adjust our attitude to practice genuine humility, but He also adjusts our attitude...

Part II: To Practice Unselfish Hospitality (vv. 12-14)

Jesus suddenly turned His attention away from the people who were jostling for the best seats in order to give some advice to the host of this dinner party. He said, **“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” (v. 12).** What in the world does this mean? Is Jesus saying that it would be wrong for us to invite a few friends over for a barbecue? Of course not! What He is saying, however, is that before we throw that barbecue, we’d better be clear as to why we’re doing it. If we’re doing it for our own benefit, expecting to be praised or hailed as the barbecue king by our friends and neighbors, then we are in need of an attitude adjustment.

If we’re practicing hospitality with ulterior motives; secretly hoping to get a little something back in return, then we’d better concentrate on inviting (or giving to) only those people who can’t possibly repay the favor. That’s what Jesus meant when He said, **“When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” (v. 13).** In Jesus’ day, no special status could be earned by throwing a party for the poor. No reward could be gained by inviting crippled, lame, and blind people. So this was something that just wasn’t done. No Pharisee, especially, would ever consider showing hospitality towards such unworthy, disgusting sinners.

Application:

When we talk about sitting down at the Father’s heavenly banquet, we need to remember what our spiritual condition once was. The Bible tells us that we were utterly hostile towards God by nature. From birth

we were completely unlovable and worthy only of God's just wrath and condemnation. So how could we possibly earn a place at God's table? We couldn't! No matter how much good we piled up for ourselves; no matter how hard we tried to gain God's favor, nothing would ever be enough. Because, **"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags"** (Isaiah 64:6), nothing we do or give could ever move God to set out that little reserve card with our name on it.

Isn't it wonderful that Jesus didn't look at our poor, spiritually crippled condition and say, "Let's see, if I leave My throne here in Heaven; if I satisfy all of My Father's requirements for them; if I spill My blood for a world that hates and wants nothing to do with Me, what's in it for Me?" No, Jesus didn't say that. He wasn't concerned about what was in it for Him. He was only concerned about what was in it for you and me. That's always been Jesus' focus: Our salvation; our eternity! The Bible says that Jesus, **"Did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many"** (Mark 10:45). Because of Jesus service to us, both in life and in death, God has His heavenly banquet table set and waiting for us. It's absolutely beautiful! And our names ARE on the table! Such love moves and compels us to practice unselfish hospitality in our own lives, even to less fortunate and less desirable people.

Conclusion:

There are all kinds of books out there that deal with proper etiquette and social behavior. For example, if you wanted to know how to address someone with respect, get incite on appropriate dinning attire, learn which fork to use for your salad, or whether to tip the soup cup toward you or away from you to get the last spoonful, then I'm confident there is an etiquette book out there for you.

This book (the Bible) has a little something to say about proper etiquette as well. No, it doesn't give us instructions on banquet seating, table manners, or dinner decor. Instead, it aims at something much deeper. It addresses proper etiquette for the heart. It adjusts our sinful, rebellious attitudes. So when it comes to making real life changes that conform to God's will for true humility and unselfish tendencies, there's only one place (one book) to turn: God's Holy Word! Through this book the Holy Spirit comes to us, empowering us to both (1) practice genuine humility and to (2) practice unselfish hospita lity. Either way, it is in Scripture Alone that *Jesus Gives Us An Attitude Adjustment!* Amen!