Jesus at a Pharisee’s house

**14**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 honour at the table, he told them this parable:

 **8‘When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, “Give this person your seat.” Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.**

**10But 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 honoured in the presence of all the other guests. 11For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves 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 sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’**

Choose to Sit in the Back of the Bus

I want to gain your impressions of a few things, and let’s see if what you say will guide the remainder of today’s message. Here’s how it will go;

I will say a word, and you will tell me if that thing is “good” or “bad.” Simple as that.

But you will not merely tell me, you will TELL me! Got it? “Good” or “Bad,” all right?

– God – The Devil

– Manchester City – Man. United -- Wycombe Wanderers

– Vanilla Ice Cream – Chocolate Ice Cream – Any Flavour of

 Ice Cream

– Vacuuming the carpet – Mowing the lawn

– The back Row at the cinema – The back Row at a

 church service

It seems that all of us have varying positions on what is good and what is bad, what is pleasant and unpleasant, what is appropriate and what is inappropriate.

It all depends on our perspective, or our experience, or our perception of ourselves.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was invited to a dinner in the home of his adversaries.

The Pharisees didn’t really like Jesus, they only wanted to get a better view of him, so they invited him to a dinner party. And when Jesus arrived, he began to notice an interesting thing:

the guests were racing to take the places of honour. They wanted to sit up front where they could see and be seen. They wanted to rub shoulders with the beautiful people and be the first to be served their meal.

And casting his gaze on the beautiful people, he said **“Shame on you for taking all the best seats for yourselves! Shame on you for assuming that you are better than those**

 **who sit behind you!**

**Shame on you for thinking you deserve to sit in the front,**

 **while you think that these people sit in the back!**

**In my Kingdom, everyone who makes themselves great will be humbled, and everyone who humbles themselves will be made great!”**

Now the gospel text doesn’t say this, but **I think** this is what Jesus might have said and done.

I think he moved his chair to the very back of the room, and then announced to the crowd **“Please turn your chairs around, for now the head table is here.”**

**The great were humbled, and the humble were made great.**

We don’t know who those **were,** sitting in the back…maybe they were the servants, but Jesus noticed that the bona fide guests were healthy, wealthy and proud.

So, Jesus said **“I’ve noticed that your guests are either related to you, or in a position to pay the favour back when they invite you to dinner.”**

And then He said to the host **“I dare you to throw a party and invite only homeless beggars into your dining room. I dare you to throw a party and ask if you can hold it for the inmates at the local jail.”**

And suddenly the tables were turned; the proud had been humbled, and the humble became proud.

The point Jesus is making at this party is that **humility** is one of the important marks of his kingdom.

Humble people make good **disciples**; proud people make for **bad followers**.

And the question for us is, are we among the proud - or are we among the humble?

I can’t answer for you. I can answer for me, and I am not too proud to tell you where I fit.

I am the one who likes sitting by the beautiful people.

I am the one that wants to be seen with the celebrities.

I am the one who would not be so likely to rub shoulders with the stranger, and the homeless, and the poor.

So, in this text, Jesus is speaking to me, and he says

“**David, everyone who makes himself or herself great will be humbled. And those who make themselves humble will be great.”**

It doesn’t have to begin by teaching the whole of the Sunday school; it might begin by taking a single role on a Sunday morning. Two Sunday mornings each month.

One summer, when the jobs were being handed out at the children’s camp, a young girl was told that she would be the Towashee girl. At first, she was excited; “Yes! I get to be the Towashee girl!” And then she asked, “What exactly does the Towashee girl do?” And the leader said,

“She gets to washee the toilets.” And for a month that summer, this young girl who wasn’t paid anything for her effort, scrubbed toilets in the girls’ dormitory. When all the campers were swimming or skiing or sailing, she spent her afternoons with Domestos, Viacal and Mr. Clean. But at the end of the summer, this is what she said:

 “My life is changed. I will never again see myself as better or more important than someone else. That’s the lesson I learned by scrubbing toilets this summer.”

If you, like me, are among the proud of this world, how will God turn us into humble servants?

**Perhaps, when we take care of people in need,**

 **God's kingdom comes.**

**Perhaps, when we help people in need, we will see**

 **a ray of sunshine penetrating the darkness.**

In his book, *Finding Hope Again*, Roy Fairchild tells about getting sick while traveling in Austria.  He was sick for two weeks and it cost him both time and money.

When well enough to travel, Fairchild boarded a train to Vienna.  He arrived there tired, broke, and depressed.

He had arranged to meet friends there earlier but had no idea where they might be now.

As he tried to decide what to do, an old woman who had been sweeping the station stopped and asked if he was hungry.

She opened a brown bag and offered him half her lunch.  Fairchild says:

"I was moved.

 She not only helped my aching hunger,

 but lifted my spirit in an unforgettable way."

They talked, and the woman told him about losing her husband and sons in the war.  Her life had been hard, but she was nevertheless thankful for many things.

As they came to the close of their conversation, Fairchild asked why she had shared her lunch with him.

She answered:

**"Jesu ist mein Herr.**

**Gott ist gut."**

**"Jesus is my Lord,**

**God is good."**

Fairchild concluded,

"She understood and lived the story of Jesus in a way that the most sophisticated scholars could never do.

 **Her faith touched mine.**"

Then Fairchild asked **this** question:

"Who was it, after all,

that I met that day in Vienna?"

Fairchild doesn't give us the answer to that question, but the answer is clear.

**He met Christ in Vienna**.

He met Christ in the presence of a woman who was ordinary by the world's standards - but who was part of the kingdom of God.

Her kingdom of God **values** blessed him, but they also blessed her.

God had not given her an easy life,

but he had given her **warmth of face, a sparkle in her eyes, and a thankful heart.**