

SERMON FOR AUGUST 16, 2020
THEME: A SLICE OF HUMBLE PIE
TEXT: LUKE 14:1, 7-14

One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. [7] Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, [8] "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, [9] and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. [10] But when you are invited, go and sit in 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 table with you. **[11] For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**" [12] He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. [13] But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, [14] and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Remember the good old days when we were able to go out to dinner and sit inside a restaurant and have a meal? Yes, those were the days. The waiter or waitress would offer you the opportunity to order some appetizers, before you order from the main menu. The appetizers act as the prelude to the main course. Once the main course is ordered and served, and before the waiter or waitress gives you the check, you will usually be asked the question if you would like dessert. The dessert is not the main course, it is not a type of food that will sustain you, and it is rather something to satisfy your sweet tooth. Usually you will be offered a piece of cake or a slice of pie, not a whole cake or pie, mind you, but just a slice to round off a pleasant dining experience.

Jesus, in our text, had just finished dining at the house of a Pharisee. The hoi polloi, the movers and shakers of the community were there, all so that they could

say that they had dined with Jesus. Jesus was the guest of honor, but the lawyers and politicians, the priests and the ruling parties each had a seat at the table, so to speak, the seating carefully arranged so as to give honor where honor was due.

There was no room at the table for the commoner. Only important people, those who mattered were allowed a seat at the table, only the important people could be with and approach Jesus this night! So imagine the shock and surprise when one of the townspeople found his way into the dining room.

Luke, the Gospel writer and physician, records that a man with dropsy came up to Jesus. Knowing that he was not supposed to be present, his presence spoke volumes. He was in desperate straits, he was willing to pull out all of the stops, do whatever was necessary to have Jesus see him. He wanted healed, and he knew that Jesus was the One, the only One who could help. But it is interesting, isn't it, that he doesn't ask Jesus to heal him, rather, Jesus, knowing that the guests were watching Jesus' every move like a hawk, asked the question: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"

The important people didn't answer Jesus' question. They were too important to answer Jesus, too important in their own minds to have this ill man in their midst. Jesus, having compassion on the man, healed him. Then, turning to those seated at the prominent positions, and knowing their thoughts of disgust, for the commoner was not like them and not even worthy of being present, Jesus asked a simple question, and even when He asked it He knew the answer. The question was: ""Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath

day, will not immediately pull him out?" [6] And they could not reply to these things. Jesus knew the answer; He knew that each of them would immediately come to the aid of their own flesh and blood, even come to the aid of one of their beast of burden. The implication was, if you are able to do this, shouldn't you do the same for a fellow human being?

These people were served, by Jesus, a slice of humble pie. But this slice of humble pie was not to be an afterthought to their dining experience; rather, Jesus intended that humility would be the main course, a way of life for those who followed Him. Jesus proceeded then to tell a story, one that hit close to home for those assembled for dinner that evening.

Jesus noticed that when the crowd took their places for the dinner, each individual had a specific place to sit, all in accordance with how important the person was in the sight of the host for the meal. Similar to our wedding reception, or a dinner which is held in honor of someone, certain people sat at the head table, others of lesser importance found their places as well. You can well imagine the guests perusing the room, looking at the name plates, finding their spots, but also silently, or perhaps not so silently, grumbling over their positions of honor, or lack of positions, as the case may be.

The one faux pax that no one wants to make in this type of situation would be to take your place, only to be told that you were not supposed to sit at that place of honor, rather you were lower on the totem pole, so to speak. To think more highly of yourself and then be put in your place would be highly embarrassing. You would

take great steps to ensure that you would not be reseated so as to show your lower standing.

This is why Jesus says: ""When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, [9] and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. [10] But when you are invited, go and sit in 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 table with you. [11] For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus knows about humility, after all, He is the eternal Son of God who humbled Himself. God became man in Christ, becoming like us in everyway without sinning, so that we might be called sons of God. Jesus is the One at the wedding feast who deserves to sit at the head of the table, but no, He came to sit in the lowest place, taking on your guilt, shame, and sin so that today He graces you with His love. At the beginning of each service we kneel to confess our sinfulness. We kneel to take the lowest place before God, and yet Christ exalts us, saying to us: Friend, your sins are forgiven, friend, come up to a higher place of honor, by God's grace for you shown on the cross. Christ exalts you, calling you His child, so that you will humble yourself in your life, to show the power of God's love to others.

You are called to show the power of God's love, not to the wealthy, not to the famous, not to those who sit in seats of earthly honor. You are called to especially

show love to the downcast and downtrodden, to the widow and to the child, to the poor and to the rejected. This is Christ's call to His followers, to be Christ like to others; to be the face and voice of Christ and His compassion to the lost and hurting. You are to love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless anyone who curses you, and pray for those who mistreat you. Give to anyone who asks of you, that you will do unto others as Christ as done to you.

Christ's call to all who are His own is to live a life of humility. Don't just take a slice of humble pie, live the call of Christ in humility. Humble yourself, then, under the almighty hand of God. Confess your sinfulness. Ask Christ for forgiveness for all your sins. Receive God's free gift of love and salvation for you in Christ. And then, in thanks to God, share the love of Christ humbly with others.

There was once a five year old boy who went to McDonald's with his mother, brother, and sister. As was their custom, they prayed before their meal. The five year old led the family in prayer, praying: "Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest, and let these gifts to us be blest." Then, he added, "And, Lord, if mom would add the gift of apple pies for dessert, I would be even more thankful. God, this is Your friend, Danny, signing out for the entire family. Amen." Many who heard the prayer smiled, except for one woman in a booth next to the family, who whispered loudly enough for others to hear: "No wonder this country has gone to the dogs. Kids today don't even know how to say their prayers. As if God doesn't have other things to do than provide apple pies. And since when do we 'sign out' at the end of a prayer."

The boy heard that comment and with a perplexing look asked his mom:

"Was that a bad prayer? I didn't know I shouldn't pray for fruit pies." Mom said, "Danny, I'm sure God liked your prayer." And then a grandpa, who was seated across the aisle, leaned over to the boy and complemented him on his prayer, saying: "I've been praying for a lot of years, and if I know God like I think I do, He would rate that prayer as being one of the best He's heard. In fact, I think it's a shame more people don't ask Him for apple pies. You know, apple pies can be good for our hearts and souls."

At the end of the meal, the mom got up and got apple pies for the whole family. When she brought the pies to the table, she issued a warning: Be careful, these pies are hot. After allowing the pies to cool the little boy picked up his apple pie, knelt on the booth seat, turned around, and tapped the shoulder of the lady who had critiqued his prayer. When she turned, the lad encouraged, "Here, I want you to have my apple pie. Fruit pies sometimes can be good for our hearts and souls, you know."

Out of the mouth of babes! This child in humility reached out to another in love. May God grant us the grace to do the same.

Amen