

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Aug. 28, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, imagine you are at a wedding, and not just any wedding, but your wedding.

Now, imagine that you have shown up to your reception and another couple has moved into your place of honor. They are sitting there at the head table as if they own the place. What would you do? More importantly, how would you feel?

When my cousin Rachelle got married I was the maid of honor. I got to sit at the head table with all of the important people – the bride, the groom, the parents, and the wedding party. We were enjoying our meal when an old friend of my cousin's decided to join the wedding party at the head table. She just pulled up an empty chair. It was really awkward, even more so when she broke out her guitar and wanted to play a song, to which my cousin gave a firm "no!"

The most awkward thing about this situation was that my cousin hadn't even talked with this woman at all since high school. She didn't have a formal invitation to the reception. She was just told she could come because someone else couldn't make it. So, she went from being not even on the wedding list to the head table.

As the maid of honor my cousin told me it was my responsibility to deal with her, which I didn't do, because I didn't want to be rude, but I kept thinking, she is being super rude.

Eventually the party moved to the dance floor and she was left alone at the head table. I'm not sure what happened after that. She was making eyes at the best man, so who knows.

People have a tendency to be concerned about place, and being in the right place, right? This friend of my cousins was not in the right place. She was totally out of place. She was not in the wedding party and shouldn't have been at the head table. In today's readings, Jesus talks about this awkwardness of guests taking the wrong place, as does Proverbs.

It's better to be humble and wait to move up until you're invited. Proverbs talks about it in the presence of a king and Jesus talks about it at a wedding banquet, and they both are likely talking about God and the first commandment. God is God and we are not, so don't take the place of God.

As you know, in the Old Testament, God said I am your king and you shouldn't have any others. But Israel begged and so God gave them a human king, which was a total disaster, just as God said it would be. But God never gave up the promise to send the people God's true king, and we know that king. He is the good shepherd. He is Jesus Christ our Lord, our king, and Savior.

The lesson of Proverbs is to walk humbly with God. Wisdom is being in awe of God and knowing that God is not us. Yes – we are created in God's image, but that's where it stops. We are a reflection of God, but not God, just as the image in the mirror is not us but a reflection of us.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God is often portrayed as the groom at a wedding banquet. Israel or the Church is depicted as the bride. So, when Jesus talks about a wedding banquet, our ears should perk up. It's not just any wedding banquet that Jesus is talking about, but his wedding banquet, and in this parable we once again get the idea of the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

In the first century, the place of honor was the place right next to the host. It was a place of honor, because as you were lounging next to the host and you had his ear. Having the host's ear was a great place to be, because you could talk about anything, you could ask a favor, or make a deal. Having the ear of the one who is the host is the place everyone wants to be.

In this parable, Jesus once again reminds us that it is the least, last, and lowly that have his ear. Jesus calls those who are left out in the dust to come sit near him.

A couple of weeks ago, on August 10, we had the feast day of St. Lawrence. If you have been to the Forum in Rome, you have likely seen the grill that Lawrence was said to have been grilled upon. Lawrence is the patron saint of chefs, because as he was being grilled he told the executioner, "I'm done on this side, flip me over." He is also the patron saint of comedians.

Lawrence was roasted over an open fire, because when Emperor Valerian in the year 258 demanded the treasure of the Church, Lawrence gathered up all of the poor and presented them to the Emperor. Yeah – the emperor didn't like that much.

The emperor was in the mistaken idea that for God, gold, gems, and such are what make up the treasury of the Church, but it's not. It's God's people. God's people are the treasure. Once again in Luke we hear that people are more important than things.

When we walk humbly with God, we realize that relationships are what is most important. Things are tools to be used in building up relationships, so when we have something that is of use to our neighbor, we share it. Or, we should.

It can be a challenge, because human beings like to decide who is deserving of honor. Well – they don't deserve it. And on the other side, we like to think that we do deserve it because we're the wealthiest, best looking, have the most friends, gave the most to the cause, are the most dedicated... You can fill in the blank here.

We all do it. The important thing is that when we realize we are doing it, that we repent and turn back to God, because none of us is deserving and no matter what we want, God's will will be done. Our prayer is that our will will be aligned with God's will, because that is when we move to the head of the table and God has our ear.

Sitting next to the host doesn't only mean that we have the host's ear, but that the host has our ear as well. Only in humility, when we put our will aside, are we then called to the head of the table, so that we can be sent out on the host's mission.

None of us deserve to sit at God's right hand. It's only when we know that, that we are called up to hear God's mission for us, and then we are sent on our way so that others can be sent as well.

God already knows what our hearts' desire. God wants us to know what God's heart desires too. So we can't approach God with only our mouths flapping. We need to be humble and listen. As a missionary friend of mine liked to say, "God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason."

God is speaking to us, and we can only hear God when we stop talking. Those who are willing to listen get moved to the head of the table.

When I was playing in the orchestra in high school, I didn't spend much time practicing, so I wasn't very good. That meant I sat in the middle, and I really liked sitting in the middle, because I could talk with all the other slackers, and we had fun.

The first chair would always glare at us, because we couldn't hear the director give us important directions. We were too busy talking. If you've ever been in an orchestra, you've likely heard the tapping of the bow on the stand to tell you to pay attention.

It wasn't until I had to lead things myself that I realized how annoying it is when people won't listen because they are busy talking and especially when they are only concerned with what they want and not to goal or what's best for the whole group. So, sometimes you just have to talk with the ones who are willing to listen and let the others go about their business.

God is looking for those who are willing to listen to the call to bring peace into the world. To listen to those who are hurting so that they can know they are loved. To listen to those who are hungry so that they can be fed with food that will nourish them. To listen to the thirsty so that they can be filled. To listen to the naked so that they can be clothed. To listen to the homeless so that they can be sheltered. To listen to those who are afraid, so that they can experience justice.

These are the ones who have God's ear. These are the ones God is telling us to care for on God's behalf. Sitting by the host means that we have the host's ear to tell our concerns and the host has our ears so that we can be sent to do his will in the world.

So, anytime we take care of the least, lost, or lowly, we are doing God's will in the world, and that is our reward, because we are doing what God has called us to do – to put people over and above stuff. It's always about seeing people and loving them in whatever way we can with whatever gift we happen to have.

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” The sacrifice of thanksgiving is giving back to God what has been given to us. We do that by stewarding our gifts for God's use, for the sake of others.

Sacrifice is not punishment and it's never used to earn God's love, but is always a response to God's unconditional love, and so giving to others gives us joy, because it means that we are part of God's will here and now.

The next time you share something with someone else, instead of saying, “I want you to have this,” try saying , “God wants you to have this.” What kind of a difference would that make in your life and in the life of your neighbor?

I think it moves both of us to the head of the table where God hears the cries of those in need and then sends us to care for them.

Every day we are on a mission for God, right here and now, and all we need to do is just listen. We not only have God's ear, but God has ours as well. Thanks be to God. Amen.