

# Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

## BEING HUMBLLED AND EXALTED

Luke 14:1, 7-14

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#### Analysis by Carolyn Schneider

10n one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. 7When 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; 9and 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. 10But 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. 11For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” 12He 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. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

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## **DIAGNOSIS: All Who Exalt Themselves Will Be Humbled**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *We Like to Sit among the Distinguished of This World*

Jesus is eating a Sabbath meal at the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees, and the other guests are watching him closely. They see him heal a sick man and send the man away (vv. 2-6). Then they discover that Jesus is also watching them closely. He calls their attention to their own efforts to seek honor for themselves from each other, as the guests claim the seats of distinction and the host invites only those who have the means to reciprocate. This phenomenon can still be seen today when we want others to see us in the reserved, first-class, private box, members-only, elite club seats with people of influence in this world. It is to us seeking to exalt ourselves in this way that Jesus addresses himself.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *We Look to Ourselves and Distinguished Others as If We Were Gods*

Our behavior betrays the fact that we make gods out of ourselves and out of those who can enhance our reputation or further our ambitions. We do not consider those who have nothing to give us worthy of our attention. We value the praise and the company of those who have power in this world because we think they can give us a share in their power and influence.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *The Real God Sends Us Down to the Lowest Place in Disgrace*

But we are not gods. The honor that we can give and take from each other belongs to the empire of this world, not to God's empire. Ultimately, the real God is the real host of this meal of life, and we are all guests together. Jesus is in the role of divine host when he welcomes and heals a sick man. He warns us

that God will come to us who have exalted ourselves into the places of honor to say, "Give this person your seat." In the very telling of his parable, Jesus strips us of our honor, and clothes us with shame for our self-seeking assessments of who has dignity at God's meal and who does not. God honors those who can only receive and not repay, whose company is no boost to our power, reputation, and influence. In God's empire the first become last and the last become first.

## **PROGNOSIS: The One Who Is Humbled Will Be Exalted**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *God Joins Us in the Lowest Place in Order to Raise Us Up*

God gathers up those in the lowest place by taking the lowest place, stripping divine honor and all things away in becoming a naked human baby from a poor family. Grown up, this human Jesus, hated by those whose idolatry he exposes, was stripped again of clothing, honor, and all dignities when he was crucified. In the tomb, Jesus joined the disgraced at the bottom end of the table, those who are sent there either by others or by God. From there God raised him to the very head of the table to be invested once again with the honor of the Son of God as host. God gives up everything to befriend human beings and to invite them to "come up higher." There is room at the table even for those who have been previously humbled. The one who was killed is made alive. In God's empire the first become last and the last become first.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *We Can Trust the Divine Host Who Honors Us and Others*

We can look to and trust this God who has honored us humans by becoming one of us and who feeds us with his own life through bread and wine. Jesus has given us his very Spirit, so we know that God will give us everything we need no matter how impossible or undeserved. We do not need to seek honor from others or expect them to sustain us in return for our

recognition of them. They are not God and we are not God. Thanks be to God.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** : *We Get to Sit with Those Whom God Has Distinguished*

Knowing that we have everything flowing from God to us, we are free to turn our attention and generosity to those who can give us nothing equivalent in return. When we do that we find that by inviting the poor, crippled, lame, and blind to share our lives and our abundance God gives us much more than the equivalent in return. We find ourselves among the people whom God has invited to the feast and wishes to honor. We are raised with these “last ones” into the empire of God in the resurrection of the righteous one, Jesus, who makes us righteous with him.