

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

At most weddings there are special tables for the bridal party and the parents, grandparents, and other relatives of the bride and groom. These tables are set in a special place. The head table for the bridal party is usually front and center so all of the guests can see the bride and the groom. The other reserved tables for family are generally close to the head table so that parents, grandparents, and others can enjoy being close to their son or daughter on their wedding day. Have you ever been to a wedding where someone sat in the wrong place? Maybe someone sat at the wrong table by accident? Maybe someone sat down at one of those special reserved tables thinking it was for them. When John and I got married, we had a mix up of sorts with seating. Our guests could choose where they sat. There were two tables marked reserved for our families. Somehow the seating arrangements got all messed up. Don't ask me how, I don't really remember. I just remember upset people because some of the guests were asked to sit in another spot so that the families could sit near the head table. It was a little stressful, but more of a misunderstanding than anything.

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus teaches us about humility by telling us a parable about a wedding banquet. Jesus observed that there were certain places of honor at a wedding banquet. He tells us to take the lowest seat and not to take a place of honor. If we sit at the lowest place, the host may come and ask us to move up to a higher place of honor. If we sit in the place of honor, the host may come and ask us to move to a different place and we would be embarrassed. We could look at this parable and think if we always take the lowest seat we might be exalted. Our human nature may get the best of us and instead of looking for the better place to sit; we all may make a run for the worst seat so that our ego can be puffed up when we are asked to move to a better place. I don't think this is what Jesus is trying to tell us here.

Jesus is teaching us more about what it means to live in the kingdom of God. We should try to be humble. We should take the lowest seat or the worst seat and leave the better ones for others. We do things out of love and grace. We are humble. We should help others and not expect anything in return. If we sit in the lowest seat we shouldn't expect to be exalted.

Jesus drives this point home in verses 12-14. He reminds us that we shouldn't invite our friends, family, or rich neighbors to dinner. Our act of hospitality may not be seen as a gift. In fact, our dinner guests may feel the need to repay the favor. Jesus tells us instead to invite the poor. Invite those who can not repay us for the meal. Don't expect anything in return. New Testament theology suggests that hospitality = the love of stranger. Hospitality isn't just having friends and family over on a Friday night. It means loving the stranger; loving the person who can not repay; helping a person who can not offer anything but the words thank you.

How do we do these things that Jesus is challenging us to do? How do we be humble and take the lowest seat? How do we reach out and love the stranger?

Our human nature makes it difficult for us to be humble. Pride is a hard thing to let go of. We might take a seat of honor or do a task that will give us a lot of exposure to make us look good. Sometimes we might think that we are the best at something and block out everyone else around us. We might think that we are the greatest thing since sliced bread and we don't need any help. Our egos can get in the way when we try to be humble. We might get caught up in the praise that others give to us and in the praise that we give to ourselves. Our heads may become inflated.

Humility is one of the most difficult attributes for a Christian. We get caught up in things we are doing. Our motivations for helping someone or inviting a friend into our homes may not be just out of grace and love. We may expect something in return. We might expect to be invited to our friend's homes in return. We might expect our friends to help us with a task they didn't know about until they got there. When we invite people; friends and family into our homes we need to stop and take a look at our motivations for doing so. In all that we do we should try to show God's love and grace.

We are called to show God's grace to everyone, especially those who society has a tendency to cast aside: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. People on the fringes of society are those that we need to reach out to.

We have a variety of ways at Saint Nicholas through our social concerns ministry that we are already doing this. We provide meals at Project Echo. We participate in Christmas in April. We gather school supplies for children who aren't able to afford their own. We collect children's books and food for the food pantry. We do a lot of wonderful things to help those in need.

Our children also do a lot for others. They share God's love and grace when they give their old toys to someone who doesn't have any or by sharing crayons and a coloring book with another child at school or daycare.

Jesus reminds us in the parable about the wedding banquet and the story of who a host should invite to his or her home that we need to be humble and not expect anything in return for the things that we do for others. He gives us great advice on how to do this: take the lowest place out of love and do not expect anything in return.

Jesus took the lowest place for us when he was hung on the cross. He invites all sinners to his table. He sets a great example for us.

Be humble. Help others. Expect nothing in return.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.