

Scripture:

Luke 14:1, 7-14

“Marks of a Christian: Humility”

Without question --- humility is one of the marks of a Christian ---- it's one of the characteristics that God desires to see in us as followers of Jesus Christ.

And we know this because the scriptures are literally loaded with stories and verses about the importance of humility.

Micah 6 verse 8 includes the memorable lines ---

“And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.”

So according to Micah ---- it is a requirement to walk humbly with God.

The book of Proverbs --- chapter 11 verse 2 also reminds us that humility brings wisdom.

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace,  
but with humility comes wisdom.”

Ephesians 4 verse 2 says ---- “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

And there are numerous other verses that stress the importance of humility --

James 4 verse 10 says --- “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” ----- we just sang this together in our last praise selection.

And on and on it goes -----

2 Chronicles 7:14 ----- we heard it in our Prayers of the family God earlier -- -- reminds us that when we are humble --- God is quick to forgive.

And Matthew 23:12 ---- 1 Peter 5:6 ----- Deuteronomy 8:2 ----- Isaiah 66:2 - ----- all speak of humility.

And then we have Philippians 2 --- picking it up at verse 3 ---

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,  
not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the  
others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ  
Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own  
advantage;

rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself...”

And of course we have today’s passage from Luke’s gospel.

Verse 11 ---“For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled --- and  
those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

But before we get to that verse ----- in verse 1 we see that ---- Jesus was  
invited to an elaborate dinner feast as a guest in the home of a prominent  
Pharisee.

Before going any further ---- I have to say right away ---- I have some  
questions.

If this was the home of a prominent Pharisee --- as verse 1 says ----- then  
why was Jesus even invited.

A prominent Pharisee would be very careful to invite all the right people ----  
-- the good people --- the important people --- the VIP’s ----- the people with  
all the clout and power in society.

They would no doubt go to painstaking detail to make sure they didn’t  
overlooking anyone of importance.

And at the same time a prominent Pharisee would also be conscious of who  
not to invite.

Just as neglecting to invite someone who just had to be there would be an embarrassment so inviting the wrong person --- the not worthy enough person would also be embarrassment.

Judges --- lawyers --- political officials ----- those with wealth and influence and power ---- the somebody's ----- the who's who ---- these would have been the people for the Pharisee to invite.

And of course --- poor people ---- street people ---- tax collectors ---- tanners --- widows --- prostitutes ---- unaccompanied women ---- the crippled and lame ---- thieves ---- criminals ---- radical teachers with few credentials --- disturbers of the peace ----- these would be the kind of people the prominent Pharisee would want to ensure he didn't invite ---- or associate himself with.

And yet ---- somehow Jesus receives an invite and is there.

Why?

I would think Jesus was a whole lot closer to the second category of people - --- the people a Pharisee would want to avoid inviting --- and associating himself with --- than he was to the first category of people ---- the people with money and power.

But then again maybe --- just maybe ----- Jesus was enough of an up and coming kind of person ---- that he was worthy of such an invite.

Maybe ----- just maybe He wasn't despised enough yet ---- and His reputation ---- and worthiness ---- and suitability for occasions such as these still hung in the balance.

Perhaps.

But I think that it's far more likely that He was invited to be observed and even cornered into saying or doing the wrong thing and then shunned and condemned.

“One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.” --- verse 1 reads.

Notice the last part ----- “...he was being carefully watched.”

And in the verses we skipped --- read them over later today.

In the verses we skipped over Jesus ----- no doubt full well aware that He is being watched carefully --- begins to challenge the Pharisees --- which of course is exactly what He does where our reading today picks back up again.

Jesus watches as the guests take their places ---- and He becomes unsettled enough that He begins to tell a parable --- a story that teaches.

And essentially He goes on to say that when coming to an event or dinner such as the one they are all currently at ----- instead of taking the seat you feel you deserve ---- the seat that is in all likelihood rightfully yours --- based on your status --- and social position ----- instead of taking that seat --- - why not immediately go and take the seat that would have been set aside for the person with the lowest status and standing.

This way ----- of taking the seat set aside for the lowest ranking person ---- this way Jesus says ----- you won't ever have to worry about taking a seat too high up and being asked to leave to take a lower seat --- and thereby embarrassing yourself.

Instead Jesus said ----- you might even get asked to “move up” ----- to a better place ----- and in that process you will come across as being honoured and lifted up in the sight of all the other guests --- as the host asks you to move to a better more prominent seat.

And after suggesting all of this --- after sharing this story ----- Jesus doesn't leave it at that ----- He takes this radical humility a step further saying --- and this part comes in the last few verses 12 and 13 ----

And He says this to the host ---- in front of everybody ----  
 “When you give a luncheon or dinner ---- do not invite your friends --- your brothers or sisters ---- your relatives ---- or your rich neighbours ----- instead invite the poor ----- the crippled --- the lame ---- and the blind.”

Jesus basically stands in the midst of these VIP's ----- and who's who of society ----- the wealthy and powerful ones ---- and basically tells them they've got it all wrong.

They've got it wrong ----- where they sit.

And they've got it wrong ----- who they sit with.

And they've even got it all wrong ----- who they choose invite to events such as these in the first place.

It's a radical humility that He's calling for.

And it's a radical humility that he's showing them step by step how to live out.

And to be clear ----- it isn't some subtle ---- or slight adjustment ----- that Jesus is speaking of here ----- it's transformational --- a complete overturning of what all those present accept and know to be socially acceptable and right.

This isn't --- "Move the table centre over a bit" --- or ----- "Adjust the guest list to include so and so and so and so."

Instead this is ----- "Hey folks --- you need to do a complete 180 ---- a total turnaround."

Lift up the lowly ----- and reposition the so called high and important ones - --- do a complete 180 --- after the low have been lifted up to prominence then place the wealthy and powerful ones around them.

Humility --- unquestionably one of the marks of a Christian ----- is all about reprioritizing in light of Christ.

Humility ----- is about loving your neighbour as yourself ----- it's about thinking less about yourself and lifting up others.

Humility is all about freeing oneself from pride and arrogance.

And as one source I consulted said ----- "Humility is all about the proper valuing of one's self ---- and the proper love of one's self --- in contrast to pride."

But what does ----- “the proper valuing and proper loving of one self ---- in contrast to pride” ----- actually mean?

Well ----- if we believe that we are all created in God’s image and all are loved by God equally ----- than it means we see everyone else’s as just as good and worthy of any and everything we are “good and worthy” of.

In other words we are no better than anyone else ---- and we are no worse than anyone else --- we are all equal in God’s sight --- God loves us all --- and God loves us all just the same ----- there are no favourites when it comes to God’s love.

To be clear ----- being humble isn’t about thinking we are lowly and others are better than us ----- that’s just simply not true.

We are to be assured of who --- of whose we are --- in Christ and therefore to allow others --- all others --- as created in Gods’ image and loved by God just as much as we are ----- to go before us ----- to have as good a seat as we have ---- to have the very best seat even ----- to choose the best piece of chicken from the serving tray ahead of us and so on.

But --- and this part is crucial ----- but ----- it also doesn’t mean that we are to be weak and spineless ---- walked over like graves.

As one preacher I heard said --- “Don’t be a grave that someone walks over.”

“Don’t be a grave that someone walks over.”

Humility isn’t about being a push over --- or a grave that someone walks over ---- as if we’re already dead.

Humility is about resting assured in God’s love in your self and for others.

Humility is about recognizing that God is building us up ----- and so in turn paying a little more attention to try to build others up in the same way God is building us up.

Again ----

Humility is about resting assured in God's love for us and for others.

It's about recognizing that God is forever building us up ----- and therefore being sure to build others up in the very same way.

And it's radical humility that Jesus holds before the Pharisee and his guests in Luke's gospel today.

It's not just ----- "Treat those who are invited in such a way that the lesser valued ones feel a bit better about themselves and get treated a little extra special."

It's --- "Rip up the guest list and draw up a whole new one where the very least likely of all ----- all make the final cut."

"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 neighbors;  
 if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor,  
 the crippled,  
 the lame,  
 the blind,  
 and you will be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'"

That's radical humility ----- and radical hospitality.

And make no mistake about it ----- it's not by mistake that Jesus speaks on humility at a meal.

Humility and hospitality go hand in hand.

As I read this passage over this week ----- I had great over arching image in my mind.

Imagine all the people on earth --- all 7.4 billion of us sitting at one great banquet table.

Imagine all people --- the world over ----- sitting at one great dinner table --  
--- and then imagine that there is enough food for everyone --- just as the  
earth produces enough food for all of the people that live here now.

And imagine ---- so there we all are --- all 7.4 billion of us around this huge  
table where God provides enough for all of us to eat and drink.

But then ----- some of the people ---- the prominent ones --- the ones people  
seem to listen to when they speak.

The ones with the higher social positions --- the ones with the power and  
influence --- the ones with the most money ----- take it upon themselves to  
organize the banquet in such a way that not everyone has enough food and  
drink.

In fact some people ----- aren't even truly felt welcomed at the table -----  
they're repositioned in such a way that it doesn't ever really look as though  
they are even wanted or welcome.

And so they go hungry --- as they are pushed off to the side ----- on the  
wrong side of a giant gap between the guests --- they're too far away --- to  
far down the great table so nobody passes anything to them --- they're not  
really worthy anyway ---- who invited them anyway?

That's a pretty sad image ----- some people thinking they are so important  
that they can actually push others aside and neglect them and deem them not  
worthy of sitting at the same table.

This in part is what Jesus is addressing ---- how we divide people up into  
categories --- deeming some good and worthy – and others not so much.

In return for God providing enough room and enough food and drink for  
everyone ---- all who gather at the table of life ----- each and every one of us  
---- are to care for each other and show humility and hospitality in this life.

That's the image I was left with.



God ensuring that we all have enough to eat and drink --- as He has done with our planet ----- and then God leaving us in control if you like ----- in charge of ensuring that we care for each other showing humility and hospitality by making sure everyone is welcome at the dinner table.

And if we truly think about this image it's not God that has failed to be humble and hospitable --- it's us --- humanity.

Jesus sets out before us in Luke 14 today ----- the etiquette at the table in the kingdom of God.

The sure sign that the kingdom of God is present is when everyone has a place set ---- the lowest and least likely of all sit up right next to whomever the world values as most important --- and everyone eats together shoulder to shoulder at the same table --- probably a round one --- or square --- certainly not a rectangular one ----- where there are ends or special spots.

That's what this passage drives home ---- everyone ---- regardless of social status power or influence ---- everyone being invited and everyone getting something to eat at the table --- the very same table.

God sets a table for all.

Right from the beginning of the Bible ----- in the Garden of Eden ----- God is feeding people --- setting a table.

And then after Eden ----- God fed Israel in the desert ----- manna.

And then a bit later God led people to a land to eat its fruits ---- "I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit --- and rich produce" ----- God says in Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 7.

And now Jesus the one who fed multitudes --- thousands --- tens of thousands even on a hillside ---- now calls for radical hospitality.

Showing us a beautiful picture ----- the table in the kingdom of God ----- ---- where both hosts and guests are humble ---- moving away from self-absorption to love of neighbour.

Humility is all about the truth about ourselves before God and one another.

Humility is about us God and others --- seeing where we fit and sit when there are at least 3 of us present ----- us God and others.

Humility can't ever just be about us and God ---- humility also involves the position of others as well ---- us ---- God --- and others --- where the seat of honour goes to God and the rest of us are all equals.

God ----- uplifted ---- held high ---  
-----and the rest of us ----- all equals --- fanned out with no special attention given to anybody.

God sets a table for all.

Humility is all about making sure everyone knows that they are invited.

God sets a table with room and provisions enough for everyone.

Humility is about making sure everyone gets some food and nourishment.

God sets a table for all.

Humility and hospitality are all about making sure everyone has a chair and is settled in --- comfortable --- made welcome and at ease --- part of the family.

God sets a table with enough for everyone.

Humility and hospitality are all about making sure that everyone gets some food and knows that it is there for them just as much as it is there for the others.

God has set the table and there is food enough for everyone.

And Jesus paints a powerful picture of just who is invited at the table in the kingdom of God ---- everyone.

Radical humility is unquestionable the mark of a Christian.

Radical humility and radical hospitality ----- room enough --- and food enough for everyone.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.  
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves...”

“And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.”

“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 neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.””

---“For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled --- and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Amen.