

Pentecost 12 Proper 17 – Year C – Track 2 - 9-1-2019

Rarely do we have a first reading and Gospel that are linked so closely as the ones we have today. Of course, Jesus knew the verses we heard from the book of Proverbs. And so did the Pharisee hosting the dinner Jesus was attending. It's almost as if, watching the people at the dinner, Jesus is simply reminding them of something they already know. "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..." He ends this little parable with what is one of the hallmark phrases of Luke's Gospel: "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." There is Mary's Magnificat again – God has taken the mighty down from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly."

Jesus is commenting on the social mores of his time. He's reminding people to be humble, even if only to avoid the shame of being asked to move to a lower position. But the carrot he dangles is that if you sit in the lower seat, the host may ask you to "come up higher" – and then "you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you."

Something seemed a little off about that to me. Jesus usually isn't so obvious. Jesus does not usually encourage us to be so self-seeking – because that's what the motivation is behind taking a lower seat – it's so that you can be invited higher and be honored by everyone. So what's really going on here?

I think this is really a critique of comparison. All of the social status maneuvering going on in the seating at the banquet table is about comparison – who is better, who sits higher or lower. Who gets honored, and who will be shamed? And when we *compare* ourselves to others, we are separating ourselves from those others. We *separate* ourselves from others, so we can make *distinctions*. Who is better? Who is deserving? Who is worthy? But from the command Jesus gave us, to love one another - and by the example he gave in the washing of feet, and in the breaking of bread and the sharing of the one cup, we *know* those are the wrong questions.

In his words to the Pharisee – "the one who had invited him" – Jesus says, essentially, that all the social status business is not part of the way of God.

"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. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." In other words, when you get to choose with whom you will associate, hang out with those on the bottom rungs of the ladder. Because they belong at the table, too. And then he adds, "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." I don't think Jesus is talking about being rewarded in the hereafter. So here I will take some liberty in translation. You will be blessed, for you will be repaid by the *resurrection, by the coming to life again* of your right self, of your true self. You will be repaid by the coming to life again of your right self. By inviting the poor, by sharing your banquet without looking for some payback or reward, you will be living out the grace and love of God, and *that* is your right self. That is your *righteousness*.

In the letter to the Hebrews, we get more clear instruction about what it means to be part of this Body of Christ – what it means to live out the grace and love of God:

"Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured."

Remember those at the border, as though your children were at the border. Remember those who are being sent away, as though you yourselves were being sent away.

We cannot say, in our profession of faith, that we believe God created all that is, all things, all creatures, all people, and then see those in prison or being tortured or at the border or being deported as "those" people. We need to say, to paraphrase Walt Kelly, "We have met the "other" – and they are us." That is the meaning of our belief in Incarnation, our belief that God has taken flesh – all flesh, all creation.

So I invite each of us today to do this: When we come to share in the Eucharist, in our mind's eye, in our hearts, let us each bring with us to the table someone who is "other"— someone imprisoned physically or psychologically, someone tortured by hatred, someone we do not really want to be with, perhaps. Let us invite to this banquet the other, carry them with us in our hearts, and pray to become what we receive – the one Body of Christ.

Because we come here, we break this bread, to share in the Body of Christ. We who are many are one Body, for we all share in the one bread and one cup.

Amen.

[Proverbs 25:6-7](#)

[Psalm 112](#)

[Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16](#)

[Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)