



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

You have blessed us with your word, Lord, may we have the courage and the kindness to live it. Amen.

Now, it was good news when I got invited back and I said, well, what should I do differently? And they said, well, they kind of felt that there might have been a quiz or an essay due walking out when you were last here. And I thought, but that's who I am. They said, well give more of yourself. But that's who I am. I believe that the more we know about creation and the creatures, the more we know about the Creator.

So with that in mind, pencils up. Here we go. Because really we're starting with the ancient Greek philosophers and all the way from them to today's contemporary therapists, they all tell us that human beings best understand the world and report on the world, share and understand our experiences by telling stories. Everything is a story. If Father Bill said to you, what are you going to do over the weekend? You tell a story. Manisha says, how are you at the door, we tell a story.

We tell stories. It's how we understand and share our experiences, connecting our story to a bigger story that will give our individual personal experiences meaning beyond the immediacy of the present moment. Be it joy or suffering, a story can contain it for us. And we are gathered here today to hear and tell the story of Jesus and to give some meaning, connection, direction to where we are now in this world as followers of Jesus in this world. And that's our story: to follow Jesus.

So in here, in this gathering, we tell the story of Jesus, where we use His words: unconditional love, absolute forgiveness, abundance, hope, joy, humility. We pray them, we sing them, we hear them, we use them, we ground ourselves in them, and in this faith community so that we do not lose heart and soul when we speak them, live them outside those doors.

So our gospel story today invites us to find ourselves on a seating chart at a dinner party at the Pharisees. Now, notice the second line. We go from an exotic, beautiful dinner at the Pharisee's house to a wedding. Well, that's just another sign that Jesus loves us. Because very few people had been to the Pharisees house and a grand and glorious dinner, but everyone in ancient culture had been to a wedding. A wedding was a village event. It was families and friends and

neighbors. Everyone has been to a wedding. So the example that Jesus uses, again, a sign of His love, an invitation for us to understand, to be part of this great story of Jesus.

Now, to really appreciate and enjoy the rumbles and the rancor that Jesus was stirring up in the Pharisees today, they were watching Him closely, we need to understand the purpose and power of table etiquette in ancient culture because food was not plentiful. Food preparation of any kind was time consuming, labor intensive. And to be invited to a meal, it was more than a meal. It was an event. Either a social, religious or political event, sometimes even a civic ceremony. So where you sat and next to whom was very important and noticed by all. Even what you were given to eat and then who served you? The gold plate, the silver plate, the wooden plate. Which wine were you poured? Even that indicates your status. Everyone at the meal was watching, calculating their position in the community.

It was expected also, as it mentioned in the gospel, that you would reciprocate. The ancient custom was you would reciprocate in an acceptable amount of time. So those in attendance obviously had to have the same resources to be able to accept the invitation. Hmm. Just another side note, all this eating and drinking that Jesus does in Luke's gospel with so many people, in so many places was a problem for His family up in Galilee as they were responsible for everyone who ever fed Jesus.

Now, luckily, not a lot of people gathered up north at His town, so Mary and the rest of His family weren't all that concerned, but they had to be at the ready. So those again, who had power and influence, the leaders in the community, they were the ones who usually extended these invitations to these kind of banquets and gatherings. They had the resources for the food. They had the servants to prepare and serve the food, and they had space big enough for everyone.

So the Pharisees in today's story, they're the leaders. They have all this. They're the leaders in the temple community, and the Jewish people looked up to them, they respected them. They were learned. They were powerful. The identity of the Pharisees was in their privilege, in their office, and their reputation. And this is what provided them with a healthy income. All those temple taxes and special offerings we hear about in the other gospel stories, that's how the Pharisees could afford these banquets that the Jewish people paid for.

Now, the Pharisees were the temple group. They knew all the rules and regulations for life. The offering of sacrifices. They're responsible for settling disputes among families and neighbors. They were the keepers of the law of the Torah, and they were the keepers of the story of the promise of the coming of the kingdom. The Pharisees, that's who had invited Jesus to dinner.

Now, in today's gospel, Jesus is offering these Pharisees some examples about how to understand God's invitation to this table in the Kingdom. Jesus was teaching that God's guest list, God's guest list includes the poor, the lame, the maimed, the blind, everyone, the very people who are forbidden to even come near the temple. The poor, the lame, the maimed, the blind, the very people forbidden to come near the temple, sit at God's table. That was jarring to the Pharisees.

And sometimes we might note that Jesus's most approachable, insightful teachings, the one this morning for all who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted. It's so precise, it's so distinct. It's just precious. It feels like a needlepoint pillow waiting to happen because we can be comfortable with that. At first hearing, it does affirm our righteousness. However, in the time we might spend crafting that pillow, stitching the needlepoint, I would like us to notice, to meditate on a very important, unspoken part in this story. No one is asked to leave the table. Everyone gets a seat at God's table. The humble, the exalted, we're all there. Jesus asked none of us to leave. We are all welcome. Jesus welcomes everyone. Everyone shares in the same meal. Jesus is offering a more open and inclusive seating. Jesus is saying righteousness is found in whoever is sitting right next to us. For where we are, God is and wants to be.

And in those moments, that's where we learn what it is to be humble. To be like Jesus, to be humble, to be open, to know the other, to want to learn about the other as the beloved of God, as we all are. To be humble is not to be weak. To be humble is not to be naive. To be humble is not to be shy. To be humble even as a Pharisees, it's not to be disgraced or shuttered. To be a truly humble person, to be like Jesus is never to be embarrassed. Consider, it is impossible to embarrass a humble person like Jesus.

Now, in the ancient writings of Sirach, it is God who plucks up the roots of the proud nation, plants the humble in their place. For it's when we let go of simple pride that we experience God's unconditional love and forgiveness for us. When we let go of that pride and become humble, we can accept God's love and forgiveness, and that is when we will know how to love, how to forgive and be a community. And that is our humility, our humbleness, our community. The humble, they have no need of flags or weapons or walls. They have God. The humble have God. To love God is to love creation.

To the letter to the Hebrews, again, it takes a more directive tone, mentioning understanding, humility with two rather famous, insightful teachings – we kind of prick our ears: "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for some have entertained angels without even knowing it." And the other one in that reading was, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and

forever." Both of these really do address humility. For, to be humble is to be fully present in creation, fully present, to be like Jesus, to be aware, to be alert, to be present to the gift and grace of everyone, maybe angels, but everyone with whom we engage. Everyone.

The humility of Jesus is His presence. Honoring yesterday, respecting today and forever, for the humble do not keep score or keep time. For every moment, for every one contains everything we need for salvation. Right now. This moment. Here comes another one. It's all we need. Jesus and one another is all that is necessary for salvation. There can be no empty seats at the table. To love God is to love creation.

So this understanding of humility is how Jesus lived His life, carried out His ministry of inviting everyone to join Him in bringing in the kingdom, proclaiming the good news of God's saving grace and forgiveness. The good news of God's love, forgiveness for all of us, each one of us, the poor, the lame, the maimed, the blind. There's nothing that can keep us away from the Lord's table, except false pride that we were warned about by the prophets this morning, the vanity that we witnessed in the Pharisees, and the fear that we carry in our own hearts, afraid that we're not enough, that there's not enough.

To really believe that God loves us, forgiveness, to have that joy and abundance just waiting on the other side of faith and the feast at this table, humility gets us all there. The humility and humanity of Jesus is in our Eucharistic prayer, the prayer we say as we gather at God's table. In goodness and love, each of us carried the image of God, who brought us out of error into the truth that we are all worthy to be at God's table, out of the sin of pride, into righteousness, that we are all sitting right next to Jesus. And out of the fear of death into life, abundance, the abundance of life at God's table.

So Jesus, who loves us, was present to everyone. I mean, even on the cross, He was loving, forgiving, attending to every relationship He encountered. Jesus was present, loving to the poor, as well as the powerful, the lame, as well as those in the fast lane. Jesus was present and loving to the maimed as well as the beautiful. He was present and loving to the blind and the visionary. His invitation to us to sit at God's table is an act of His own humility, the humble gifts of bread and wine. He said, this is my body. This is my blood. This is who I am and calling you all to be, to remember, to re-member that everyone belongs around this table to hear and tell the story.

So we come here today to God's table and remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That's our story. We come here today to hear and tell the story, to remember, to renew our own lives, to be a witness of the humble life of Jesus. We come here invited by Jesus, who graciously invites us all. No matter if

we're poor, lame, maimed, or blind, we all come to God's table. And when we do, none of us are poor. We are rich in mercy and love and forgiveness, and none of us are lame for we are free to follow the Spirit, to follow Jesus. And we come to the table, not maimed because each of us are radiantly beautiful in the eyes of God. And we are no longer blind, for we are able to see the kingdom of God is at hand right here, right now among us, and that's our story and we're sticking to it.

Hallelujah.