



'Please Be Seated'

Lectionary 22 – Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
8:30 & 10:45 am, August 28, 2016
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Proverbs 25:6-7](#); [Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16](#);
[Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)

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

A stitch in time saves nine. The early bird catches the worm. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. No use crying over spilt milk. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Look before you leap. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Don't count your chickens before they hatch. Pride goeth before the fall.

Shall I go on?

Perhaps there's no need to continue listing aphorisms—those pithy little wisdom sayings that have been around for centuries. We are already familiar with them. Ben Franklin didn't invent them, but he sure managed to popularize them through his *Poor Richard's Almanac* during our colonial period.

These sayings—or versions of them—**have** been around for centuries. Just take a gander sometime at the book of Proverbs in the Bible's Old Testament, and you'll see that witty wisdoms have been a way of looking at life for a long, long time. They were a way of understanding life's ups and downs, suggesting how to be and act so you might have some modest chance of success. Everybody spouted these proverbs.

So when Jesus, invited to a meal at the home of a Jewish religious leader, offered his rendition of a saying about banquet etiquette, no one was really surprised by his words. They had heard those words before...in the book of Proverbs.

Jesus was quite observant when he arrived at the Pharisee's home. He noticed where people chose to sit, with some selecting the most favored seats of honor. Perhaps those guests were the wealthier ones, the more influential ones, the guests who ran in higher circles. Hard to say. But even so, Jesus pulls out this ancient wisdom saying about how it is not wise for you as a guest at a wedding banquet to sit down in a preferred seat of honor, just in case the host has invited someone better than you. Wouldn't you be embarrassed if the host requests that you move and take a lesser seat to make room for that more distinguished guest? Instead, "... 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." (Luke 14:10)

No one was surprised by Jesus' words since they all were familiar with the same aphorism found in Proverbs. The people who chose the best seats might have been a little

offended by Jesus, but they were not surprised. They probably thought to themselves, well, here's a teacher who knows his scripture well. He fits right in with the rest of us here who also know scripture so well.

It is at that moment that Jesus surprises them. In this roomful of powerful people who were movers and shakers in society, Jesus manages to bring them all down a few notches. See, the guests ponder this proverb and consider how they might act pseudo-humbly, with false humility, appearing modest and self-deprecating while at the same time positively drooling at the thought of being exalted at the banquet: "Oh, no, I'll just sit back here. I couldn't possibly sit in the best seat of the house, it's not my place—oh, well, if you **insist**, sure I'll sit up there..."

And Jesus basically says, you want to talk about humility? Let me tell you what real humility is, and how in God's kingdom the truly humble are viewed.

Well, the dinner host and guests were not at all ready for what came next. That's the moment Jesus tells them that when they host a meal of fellowship, don't keep on inviting the same fellows, the good ol' boys network. Don't invite the people who will make your dinner party the envy of the neighborhood. Don't invite the folks who are sure to invite you in return to their home for an equally scrumpdillyicious meal where you can rub elbows with the rich and famous. Don't try to host a banquet in order to one-up each other with ever-more elaborate settings.

Instead, when you host a meal, invite the truly humble. Those who cannot repay the invitation. Those who are poor. Hungry. Lonely. Isolated. Low in status. Or those who seem different from us. Most of all, those who are in need of knowing they themselves are welcomed and valued. Invite **those** persons to your dinner party, says Jesus. And God will rejoice at your good and faithful act.

This summer I offered a Sunday School class, leading folks through the book *Reclaiming the "L" Word* by Kelly Fryer. Fryer led her congregation, Cross of Glory Lutheran Church, to a deeper understanding of their Lutheran roots. They ultimately developed a set of 5 guiding principles that described who they were and what God would have them be about. Here are those five principles:

1. **Jesus is Lord.**
2. **Everyone is Welcome.**
3. **Love Changes People.**
4. **Everybody Has Something to Offer.**
5. **The World Needs What We Have.**

Do you see the second principle? Everyone is welcome. Jesus our Lord certainly seems to indicate so, and today's Gospel reading is just one of many places where that principle is lifted up for the followers of Jesus. Everyone is welcome.

Of course, you and I are not always good at subscribing to that principle. Don't some of us naturally prefer rubbing elbows with those like us? Aren't some of us more comfortable associating with folks we already know? And if we are going to meet new people, well, wouldn't we rather meet a celebrity or two? I mean, wouldn't that be cool?

But if we are going to be the Church—the Body of Christ in this world—and follow his path in this world, I suppose we are going to need to practice this principle, that

everyone is welcome. Maybe it is true what I read recently—that here at Church is where we practice Church, practice being disciples, so we can be a more faithful Church out there.

We can start practicing today, you know. It begins in as simple a manner as sharing the peace with someone you don't yet know in this worship space. You are about to share the Lord's Supper with them—true table fellowship—so why not share his peace first? And then afterwards, continue to extend the hand of peace with them. Learn their name, offer them yours, and enjoy a cup of coffee together at the Garden of Eatin'.

We can start practicing today, as we welcome young children in this space to grow in faith with us, baptizing them and offering them opportunity to learn and serve.

We can start practicing today. This evening at 5:30 Trinity will host a "Goodbye Summer" party. You've been encouraged to invite your neighbors to join us here. Our publicity has been intended to reach out beyond, way beyond, our membership. We have no idea who will show up. But when they do show up, we can practice that principle that everyone is welcome. If you plan to join us this evening, I suggest you set up your folding chair near someone you don't know, and strike up a conversation. Turn to the person behind you in the food line and ask them what their favorite picnic food is. Oh, and I think there is still time to sign up to volunteer in some way—set-up, welcoming, serving, playing games, clean-up.

Our "Goodbye Summer" party doesn't require tickets. There is no cost for the food and entertainment. No expectation of some kind of reciprocation. This party is a gift, not unlike the gift of Jesus, bestowed on us by our gracious God.

It seems to me that the more you and I at Trinity welcome others, offer ourselves freely, and share what we have been freely given from God, the more "practiced" we will become at this, and thus the more you and I will begin to do this in those other places of our lives. We will be blessings to God's children everywhere, so they might begin to know and understand that they **are** God's children. **AMEN.**

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