

Luke 14:1, 7-14

15th Sunday after Pentecost

August 30, 1998

Those who humble themselves will be exalted, and those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

When Mother Teresa died the world stopped to take notice. She had given her life to holding the dying, those whose thanks could be ^{given} repaid only on the other side of the grave. The poorest of the poor she served, the lowest place at the banquet of this world she took. Yet when she died all the world took notice. I turned on my radio and heard stories of this woman who in faith followed Jesus. She humbled herself, she was exalted.

But don't try it at work. Don't take the lowest place there. They will think you belong in the lowest place. Some hotshot who is all talk and no action will be promoted over you. The next thing you know you will be working your tail off while he is out playing golf with the boss.

Don't say to the soccer coach, "Coach, I belong at the end of the bench, everyone else should play before me." For the soccer coach will not say, "Friend, I want you to be my starting goalie." No the coach will more likely say, "With an attitude like that you will never be a winner."

Don't even try it at church. Quietly, humbly helping out, doing those things for which you take no credit, expect no rewards. Soon everyone will be thinking that it is your job to water the bushes or wash the windows or lock the doors and won't even say thanks. Though they may try to heap another job on your already burdened shoulders.

Jesus was at a dinner party
→ (Jesus spoke of attending a wedding banquet.) When he saw how people were choosing the places of honor for themselves he told them to seek the lowest place so that when the host came in he might say, "Friend move up higher and they would be honored in the presence of all."

Faith. To take the lowest seat means you have faith in your host. To take the lowest seat means that you know your host so well and are known by the host so well that you have no doubt that your host will notice. "Friend" is his address.

If you know you can count on your boss, if you know your boss will not be impressed by a lot of slick words but pays attention to performance then you can forget about self-promotion and get down to work. You will not be forgotten.

If you trust the soccer coach then you can quietly go about doing your best and know that you will not be overlooked because you are not pushing and shoving to be first in line.

If you have confidence in others in the church, you can work hard knowing they will notice and say thanks.

But Jesus was not talking about bosses or soccer coaches nor even about other members of the church but about God. That becomes clear in his next advice.

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 and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

The resurrection of the just. Bosses or soccer coaches or pastors won't be in charge there. Only God is in charge there. You will be repaid then, Jesus promises.

God is watching. God is the one who will say, Friend come up higher.

Have faith in God.

I am astounded by the money that is in the offering plates. One family gives great amounts, another family gives little or nothing. Both families are honored here, visited in times of sickness or need. You could keep all your money for yourselves and have a real bargain here. But so many of you do not. You give freely, quietly, regularly. Humbly. I think you must have faith in God. You must trust that your gifts are pleasing to God.

I am astounded by the diversity of this congregation. The people who watch how churches grow tell me that a homogenous church is best. a church where everyone sees people just like themselves will be more attractive. But I am struck by how week after week a congregations gathers here that does not walk in the same social circles during the week, yet you honor one another here and are honored to call this diverse people your sisters and brothers in Christ. You must trust that God has called you together here.

I am astounded by the continual giving of time here. ^{People} ~~Women~~ gather to assemble newsletters and directories, one comes each week to fold the bulletins, another to open the windows early on a Sunday morning, another still to prepare the altar, another still to fertilize the flowers, another still to prepare the newsletter and then there are all the committees and circles and governing boards, ~~and~~ I haven't even touched on all the things you do to serve the poor and the lonely out there, beyond these walls. How many thousands of hours are given away each year! You must have deep faith in God who calls you to give in these ways.

But not everyone who holds the poor ends up like mother Teresa, honored by the world. Sometimes what is given because of faith in God is greeted with mocking. Sometimes even those we counted on to stand beside us run and leave us alone in our hour of trial. Sometimes the very ones we helped cry out for our crucifixion.

Follow me, says Jesus. ^{you?} I hope I will not have to follow him through mocking, abandonment, the cross. But I know that God who raised Jesus will not forget you. Though the sky ^{turn} should ~~try~~ black, and the enemy be gloating, and pain more than you can bear, God sees, God remembers, you will be repaid.

Trust in God.