

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 17  
Year C

Sirach 10:12-18  
Psalm 112  
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16  
Luke 14:1, 7-14

It has been said that, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is going to a meal, at a meal, or leaving a meal. Today's reading fits into that generalization. We find Jesus at a meal in the house of a leader of the Pharisees. The table is a place for fellowship and communion for Jesus. Not only is it a place for physical nourishment, it is where discussions about important matters can take place. It is also where Jesus can challenge cultural norms, usually upsetting those who hold positions of authority in that society. One commentator describes this as an early form of a "sit-in" - Jesus' own form of a visual sermon, a cultural critique, and a social protest.

These social functions were closely watched, not only by the attendees, but also those spectators who were attracted to such feasts. Who was invited, where people sat, and what was served were all subjects of comment. The interaction between guests was also a favorite attraction. Thus, Jesus used these opportunities to comment on the culture in which He lived.

In the story today, Jesus first addresses the guests of the banquet. He has noticed how some have rushed to get the best seats, those closest to the host. They were as much interested in being seen as they were in what they might eat. The people at the head table were obviously the most important and they wanted that glory. How embarrassing it must have been to have the host come to someone and say they needed to give their seat to someone more important. Jesus suggests that a better plan is to take a seat down among the common folk. Then, think of how great it would be to have everyone notice the host escorting you to a better place.

Jesus' advice to the host is a little more difficult to accept. It was very prestigious to have the finest array of guests at one's banquet table. Therefore, everyone would invite the most important people in the community to sit at their table. Jesus says that it would be better to invite the poor, the cripple, and the outcasts. This is very counter-cultural. Why would anyone want to invite people like that to their banquet? They would be the laughingstock of the community. You can almost hear the critics say, "Is that the best he can do?"

In both cases, Jesus is looking, not at the world around Him, but at a banquet that will happen in the future - the heavenly banquet of the end times. It is His contention that this future banquet is when the people will be rewarded for who they associate with in this life. Seeking not the glory of their fellow men, but God's glory is the goal.

What is the point Jesus trying to make in this story? What are we to learn from this? Rarely do any of us through parties like this, where we might be tempted to invite all the rich and famous to dinner. How are we to live out the moral of this story?

Perhaps we are focused on the wrong things. Perhaps this is really not about who comes to dinner, but how we might better interact with our neighbors. The problem Jesus is highlighting in this passage is people spend more time seeking blessings than being blessings. If our focus is on what we can get from God, we are missing the entire message of Jesus' ministry. When scripture tells us "it is more blessed to give than to receive", this is exactly the same message Jesus presents here. In the story about the banquet, Jesus is pointing out that both the guest and the host were seeking blessings. But, by inviting those who could never repay the host - the poor, the lame, and the outcast - Jesus is reminding those listening that blessing others is our mission.

As we look around us at new opportunities to serve our neighbors, we are following the advice Jesus gives us. Whether it is feeding the hungry, providing a safe space for people seeking sobriety, or offering a warm heart to someone down and out, we are blessing those in need. We are doing what Jesus has called us to do.