

KINGDOM VALUES: HUMILITY & WELCOME

Luke 14:1, 7-14

August 31, 2025

I have preached at least two sermons over recent years that dealt with citizenship in the kingdom of God. One that I remember was centered on love; one was about faithfulness. Well, here we are again—and it won't be the last one, I assure you—looking at citizenship in God's kingdom.

Jesus came to earth to show us who God is and how we are called to live in the kingdom of God now. Jesus shows us by example—by the way he lives—and by telling stories or parables—parables about what God's kingdom is like, about what God's grace is like, and about what God's judgement is like. Today's text includes kingdom parables about citizen behavior in God's kingdom. This behavior is not specific how-tos—what we do as citizens—but more about one's mindset—how to be a citizen in the kingdom. Both parables could be read as what's, but the Good News of the gospel here lies in the how's.

Jesus most often tells parables in the context of a real life situation, but transforms or shifts one's attention to a kingdom focus.

Luke tells us that Jesus is in the home of a leading Pharisee, invited there for a dinner with other guests. The host and his guests were “watching Jesus closely.” But Jesus was watching them closely as well—watching the guests as they arrived and chose seats at the table. He told the guests a parable about a wedding banquet. Be careful about how you choose seats, he said, lest you choose a seat near the host and may have to be asked to move back because that one was reserved. Choose a seat near the back of the room; if the host wanted you to sit elsewhere, he will re-seat you. This practice of seating by rank or social status was a characteristic of the world in which they lived. Jesus was not challenging that etiquette, but using that moment to observe how different that was from kingdom etiquette—how differently one behaves in God's kingdom. Humility, not pride, is the norm. Then the familiar verse: “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Then Jesus spoke to the host, in effect, asking how did you construct the guest list in the first place; it seems to include exclusively the friends and neighbors who will return the favor of a dinner invitation. Where are the “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind”—the ones who cannot return the favor. You would “be blessed, because they cannot repay you.”

The Pharisee and his guests may have been watching Jesus. But Jesus was indeed watching them and used the occasion to teach truths about the nature of the kingdom of God. That's what Jesus did: he used the real and the ordinary of this world to talk about citizenship in God's kingdom. And that is his message to us today. God is telling us how to be in his kingdom right here and right now.

The whole thing causes me to squirm a bit. How about you?

I'm remembering a moment that I had in this very sanctuary. I was already sitting in a pew, preparing myself for worship. Someone came in and sat in the pew in front of me. I don't remember who that person was. Then a long-time member of this parish arrived. The first individual was sitting in the pew she usually sat in, She said to this person: "excuse me, you are sitting in my pew and need to move." This may not be so much a story of status, but it was a story about rank, power, or ownership. I have never forgotten that.

I'm thinking about a situation in my life many, many years ago, having to do with my "guest list." I still remember it vividly because God used it to teach me a lesson. It's about how I make choices. I was at a workshop or retreat and we were doing some pretty heavy work on who we were and what our inner life was like. After an hour or so of group discussion—the group numbered 12 or so and there were some in that group that I was drawn to and some I didn't particularly like—we were to team up in pairs to share more deeply. I confess ... you know what I'm going to say, don't you: "I'm hoping we could choose our partner." Well, not so. We were assigned partners and I was paired with the one I would not have chosen ... no way. As it turned out, it was a great match. And that taught me a lesson I have never forgotten.

You have heard me refer to the insights I have learned from the biblical scholar, Robert Farrar Capon. He reads all the parables in the light of "the last, the least, the lost, the forgotten"—the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son, etc. well, here it is again: the lowest seat & the forgotten guests. Jesus teaches lesson after lesson about citizenship in the kingdom being characterized by values that consistently run counter to the values of our "biggest, highest, most successful, most powerful" societal norms. We were born and bred in this kind of world. Jesus calls us to resist such *modus operandi*. That is the lesson and challenge of the gospel text today.

What might Luke 14 have to say to us, and our faith community today? The text speaks powerfully to the way in which the kingdom Jesus inaugurated already subverts human social systems that so often reward the "have's" and further disadvantage the "have-not's."

I think it calls us to embrace humility and radical inclusion.

I ask you—

What seat will you choose at the party table?

Who is on your "guest list"?