

## Luke 14:1-14

*Jesus advises his followers not to take places of honour at feasts, in case they be asked to move and are humiliated. Rather, he invites them to take seats at the foot of the table, so that if they are invited to a better place, they will be honoured. Further, when hosting dinners, he encourages them to invite those who cannot repay – the marginalised and rejected.*

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?” But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?” And they could not reply to this. When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But 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 honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” He said also to the one who had invited him, “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 righteous.”

This text could be read as good table manners for living wisely. But few of us would equate gospel with books on etiquette or directives on manners. The text moves to explicit theological and eschatological (future) language: “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” In our table manners we may see poking through not just our real selves revealed for what we are, but God’s true table purposes. We may be thinking short term; God views it all within a divine horizon that invokes the presence of the one who is both Guest and Host. Theologically, we will have discovered that the tables have been turned: turned in humility, welcome, and above all, grace. *(David Schnasa Jacobsen, Working Preacher)*

## COCU54C Readings

One word, perhaps, sum up the Lectionary readings this week: humility. In the face of a culture in which we are all encouraged to ‘value ourselves’, to ‘reach for what we want’ and to ‘not let anyone stop us’, this can be a difficult, even ridiculous, word. To claim that true, vibrant, authentic life is found in simplicity, fidelity, contentment and humility sounds naive and out of touch. And yet, this is exactly what Jesus asks us to believe - and to embrace - this week.

In western culture, the quest for recognition, influence, wealth, fame and the praise of others drives all too many of us. Ultimately, this pride-filled drivenness leads us into conflict and destructiveness, as all of life becomes a game of winners and losers. The great narratives of different faiths are then placed in competition with each other for the ‘honour’ of being the ‘ultimate truth’. The priorities of nations are placed into conflict as politicians wrestle to find a place in the corridors of world power, while their people’s needs are used as bargaining chips or forgotten altogether. Values, integrity and fidelity all end up being expendable as success, victory or popularity become the ends which justify any means.

And, as this driven, competitive way of being spreads through the world, we all pay the price in increasing rates of divorce, heart (and other) disease, conflict and inequality. But, of course, those who end up paying the most are those at the ‘bottom’ of the game – the innocent losers. Into all of this a simple word of justice speaks – humility can heal our world. As we learn, individually, nationally and globally, to live with simplicity, contentment, respect and integrity – and expect the same from our leaders and our corporations – the game of winners of losers begins to shift to a playful, collaborative game of shared benefit. And then, our eyes are opened to the fullness of life that is found in the hidden, poor and forgotten places – places that the rich and wealthy never see.

Too often the voices that lead and influence us even in the Church are not those who are the most devoted, prayerful or compassionate, but those who have succeeded at society’s game. What would it mean for you, as an individual and as a church community, to take the lowliest seat at the table? To step out of the game of success and winning, and into the world of simplicity, humility and service? To give the most attention and energy not to the wealthy, recognised or influential, but to the forgotten, the marginalised and the excluded? What would your Church look like if it embraced humility and simplicity as its primary values? How would it need to change?

*(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

### **Psalm 81: 1-2, 10-16**

*God brought Israel out of Egypt, and longs for Israel to listen to God and follow God's ways, but they want nothing to do with God.*

Sing aloud to God our strength;

**shout for joy to the God of Jacob.**

I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

**“But my people did not listen to my voice;**

**Israel would not submit to me.**

So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels.

**O that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!**

Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes. Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him, and their doom would last forever.

**I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”**

Psalm 81 begins with a call to praise, recalling the Exodus out of Egypt so many generations ago. Then God's anguished voice begins to speak. God had offered rescue and freedom, and relieved the people's burden, but the people continued to rebel. While God has fed them with tears (Ps 80:5) God's desire had been to fill their mouth with 'the finest of the wheat' and 'honey from the rock' (v.16). This is a lovely message of sustenance, of feeding. While the 'finest of wheat' can be comprehended, one does not get honey from a rock! 'Honey' is clear. Its sweetness is a delight and desirable. It was a delicacy in ancient times. But the reference to the rock has little to do with the source of honey. It is an allusion back to the Exodus, and the place of testing, Meribah (v. 7, not part of our reading today). There God had given the people water from the rock in the wilderness. It is a reminder of the harsh places through which the people had been led, and of God's provision in the most unlikely spots. There is hope in the face of both a recalcitrant people and the direst of circumstances. It is God's desire to feed them with the finest wheat and honey. As the church comes regularly to the communion table we remember the fulfilment of that promise, the cost of it to God, the dire circumstances of the cross, and indeed the ongoing call to repentance and discipleship. *(Howard Wallace)*

### **Jeremiah 2:4-13**

*God speaks out against God's people who have forgotten God's salvation and turned to other gods – God's people have abandoned God who is the fountain of living water and have dug cracked cisterns for themselves.*

Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves? They did not say, "Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?" I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord?" Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit. Therefore once more I accuse you, says the Lord, and I accuse your children's children. Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

### **Hebrews 13:1-8,15-16**

*Words to live by: Love one another and be hospitable, share the pain of those who suffer, be faithful in marriage, be content with what you have and follow the example of faithful leaders.*

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.