

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 14:1, 7-14

***"In God's Eyes"***

Could you imagine if I looked out here and I said "Johnny, you and CJ are sitting in the wrong place – you need to come up front here. (I don't really want you to move – I am just saying" Could you imagine that happening – "and Chesley – you don't belong all they way back there, you belong over here in the front." And then again – "what are you doing up here in the front?"

In today's Holy Gospel, Jesus is talking about the way in which people of His day were trying to achieve the best position in the eyes of God. Jesus saw that they were eager to push themselves forward, to show how well they were keeping the law, maintaining their own purity and piety. They were the kind of people Jesus found trying to associate with Him and He knew that they were the wrong kind of people! Jesus was reaching out to the people nobody wanted anything to do with – the outcasts. This parable is practical human wisdom, a warning against pride and arrogance; a warning against trying to push yourself forward, past others in the sight of Almighty God, in God's eyes.

Back in Jesus' day, the Jewish custom at a dinner was to arrange couches in a U shape with a low table in front of them. Guests would recline, always on their left elbow, and they would be seated according to their status, with the place of honor being the seat at the center of the U. The farther away you were from that seat of honor – it meant that your status was lower. If someone came in and set themselves in the seat of honor, but then someone more prominent arrived, the first group would be asked to move to lower seats. The more people came - the only seat that would still be open would be at the lowest place.

Jesus used the illustration of the 'wedding banquet' to be an example of the Messiah's kingdom. Those people who sought honor for themselves would be 'cut down to size.' Jesus explains that honor cannot be taken, but instead it must be given by God, Himself. He will not honor those who seek to honor or exalt themselves!

Those who exalt themselves are the arrogant people, who would rather talk than listen, dominating the conversation with their own thoughts and ideas. Whatever you have to say is less important to them than what they have to say. They keep cutting you off to get back to their ideas. They constantly think everyone else is far less important than they are. They treat people as inferior.

Unfortunately, some people try to give the appearance of being humble in order to influence others, and then there are others who think that humility means putting themselves down. Truly humble people compare themselves only with Jesus Christ, realizing their sinfulness, and their limitations, and the huge gap that exists between them and Our Lord Jesus Christ. They also recognize their gifts and strengths, willing to use them as Christ leads them. Humility is not self-degradation, but it is realistic assessment and a commitment to serve Him. Sadly, I have met with people who had a horrible image of themselves, and if I asked

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them if they liked themselves, with the answer usually no! I pray that they, the next time they look in a mirror – you would see themselves as God sees them. It would be good for each of us to remember that we are – each one of us - unique, special, and loved, beyond compare! God sees you as His beloved creation and you are His child. Please do not take that lightly.

In the first century, there were "status symbols" that helped people enhance and protect their standing in society. If you happened to be invited to the "right homes" and were seated in the "right places," then people would know how important you really were. The emphasis was on reputation, not character. It was so much more important for people to sit in the right places - than to live the right kind of life. Success that comes only from self-promotion is temporary, and you could be embarrassed if you were asked to move down.

When Jesus suggested that the guests take the lowest places, He was not giving them a "ploy" that guaranteed promotion. The false humility that takes the lowest place is just as hateful to God as the pride that takes the highest place. God is not impressed by status in society or your place in the church. He is not influenced by what people say or think about people, because He sees the thoughts and motives of the heart. Just hear what God says in 1 Samuel 16:7 – *“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”* God still humbles the proud and exalts the humble. The Lord reminds us in James 4:6 *“That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.””*

It has been said that humility is not thinking less of us, it is simply not thinking of ourselves at all. Jesus is the greatest example of humility, and we would do well to ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to imitate Him. I am reminded of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians 2:3-11 in which he writes: *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Those are very powerful words!

Jesus knew that the host had invited his guests for two reasons: to pay them back because they had invited him to past feasts, or to put them under his debt so that they would invite him to future feasts or events. This kind of hospitality was evidence of pride and selfishness. He was "buying" recognition. In our Lord's time, it was not considered proper to ask poor people and handicapped people to public banquets. Women were not invited either! But Jesus commanded us to put these needy people at the top of our guest list because they cannot pay us back. If our hearts are right, God will see to it that we are properly rewarded, but that must

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not be the motive for our generosity. When we serve others with unselfish hearts, we are laying up treasures in heaven and becoming "rich toward God." Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Today's modern world is very competitive. In the last week or so we had the opportunity to drive two and a half hours each way, wherever we were going – Tallahassee or Jacksonville Beach – regarding the Spunkster. Now when you are driving on US-1 or 319, people are just trying to get past you, and you know what, they are forgetting, and I was telling Don about this the other day. Do you know what that little thing is next to the steering wheel that goes up or down and is supposed to tell someone behind you that you are going to the right or to the left? All I have to do is ask the Bagley's who have been on the road for over two months and they have had the opportunity to witness this every day. I said to Don, what is with that and he said that people are just not considerate. They are just not thinking about who is behind them and just thinking about themselves. Wanting to get to the right lane or the left lane, or then I just want to pass that guy. It is really incredible. It is being competitive. It is from the Church of "I, Me, Mine" because everything is about ME! There was a song on the Let It Be album, by George Harrison called "I, Me, Mine" and it is so true. It should not be about me, and instead of going toward me, it should be going toward God. The thought is I don't want to compete with everyone, but I just want to beat them! It is easy for God's people to become more concerned about profit and loss, or passing somebody than they are about sacrifice and service. "What will I get out of it?" or even "What's in it for me?" We must attempt to maintain the unselfish attitude that Jesus had and share what we have with others.

That doesn't mean that you have to empty your home, or empty your pockets, but empty your heart. Show people, look at them and show them how much you love them, or how much you care about them. Sometimes it is just making eye contact, a touch on the shoulder, just a word, "how are you?", "I haven't see you in a while." It is wonderful to relate. Sharing what you have with others.

And so, on the Day of Judgment, many who today are first in the eyes of men will be last in God's eyes, and many who are last in the eyes of men will be first in the eyes of God. It is not about our place in line! It is about our place in God's eyes.