

9.26.2021 Trinity 17 (Luke 14:7-11)

Our sermon this morning begins with the story of where dogs and cats come from. One day Adam was walking in the garden and cried out, “God, here in the garden You have given me cattle and birds and beasts, but still there are times when I’m lonely here, and it’s difficult for me to remember how much You love me.”

And God said to Adam, “I will create a companion for you that’ll be with you forever, and will be a reflection of My love for you. Regardless of how selfish or childish or unlovable you may be, this new companion will love you.” And God created a new animal to be a companion for Adam. And it was a good animal. And God was pleased. And the new animal was pleased to be with Adam and it wagged its tail.

And Adam said, “Lord, I’ve already named all the animals in the kingdom and I can’t think of a name for this new one.” And God said, “Because I have created this new animal to be a reflection of My love for you, his name will be a reflection of My own name, and you will call him Dog.” And Dog lived with Adam and was a companion to him and loved him. And Adam was comforted. And God was pleased. And Dog was content and wagged his tail.

After a while, it came to pass that Adam’s guardian angel came to the Lord and said, “Lord, Adam has become filled with pride. He struts and preens like a peacock and believes he’s worthy of adoration. Dog has indeed taught him that he’s loved, but perhaps too well.” And the Lord said, “I will create for him a companion who will be with him forever and will see him as he is. This companion will remind him of his limitations, so he will know that he’s not worthy of such adoration.”

And God created Cat to be a companion to Adam. And Cat would not obey Adam. And when Adam gazed into Cat’s eyes, he was reminded that he’s not the supreme being. And Adam learned humility. And God was pleased. And Adam was greatly improved. And Dog was happy and wagged his tail. And Cat didn’t care one way or the other.

Our Second Lesson this morning is a parable Jesus told that’s often interpreted as nothing more than a simple lesson in humility, because Jesus told this parable to those who were pridefully choosing the best seats at the table. He said, “*When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit*

*down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Luke 14:7-11).

This parable is often seen merely as a simple lesson in humility, and perhaps prudence, that in the context of our sermon this morning might be stated this way: When you've been invited to a great banquet and you're ready to choose a seat at the table, look at yourself from your cat's perspective. See yourself as you are. Be mindful of your limitations. Humble yourself, and you will be exalted. We recognize truth in those statements, but we must be sure not to limit our understanding of what Jesus intends to teach us in this story because this parable is not a bit of good advice about humility from a great human teacher. This parable is an invitation from Almighty God to enter into life, the abundant life that He has provided for His people through the precious death and glorious resurrection of His only Son our Lord.

Through this parable God is inviting us to enter into life, and in this story we find His invitation given in the form of a command. Jesus stated this command by saying, "*But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place...*" Now you may be wondering how a command to sit down in the lowest place could possibly be an invitation to enter into the abundant life Christ came to give us (John 10:10), and you have reason to wonder, because our culture has taught us that the abundant life is found at the front of the line, or at the head table. We live in a world where we see people, often literally, fighting for the best seats, reaching out to grab what they think they deserve, and therefore this command to come in, *and choose to sit down in the lowest place*, not only sounds very unappealing, from a worldly perspective it doesn't seem to make sense.

At this point it's important to remember, once again, that this parable isn't a simple lesson in humility, and this command isn't just a bit of good advice. We must be mindful of Who is speaking these words. They weren't spoken by a great human teacher who was instructing us on *The 7 Habits of Highly*

*Effective People*, how to *Think and Grow Rich*, or the best way to *Awaken the Giant Within*. If this statement was made by even the greatest human teacher then we could take it or leave it, or form our own opinion on whether or not this is the best course of action, but the fact is that our Savior Christ spoke these words, and He is not a great human teacher, He is God Almighty, and His command to “*go and sit down in the lowest place,*” which from a worldly perspective doesn’t sound appealing or make sense, is in fact an invitation, to come up to the highest place.

To help us better understand the truth that this command to go lower is in fact an invitation to go higher, let’s consider another passage of Scripture. You may remember that on the Feast of St. James we talked about James and his brother John, those “*sons of thunder*” (Mark 3:17), approaching Jesus with their mother, who made this request, “*Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom*” (Matthew 20:21). In James, John, and their mother we see an example of people fighting, not only for the best seats, but for the best seats at the head table, and do you remember what our Lord said to them? He gathered His disciples, who had all been arguing amongst themselves about which one of them was the greatest, and He said, “*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:25-28).

“*Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave,*” or in other words, “*When you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’*” Our Savior Christ, He who invited us, commands us to “*go and sit down in the lowest place,*” to the end that He may say, to those He calls friends, “*Friend, go up higher.*” The command given in this parable is an invitation from Almighty God to come up to the highest place, by entering through the lowest.

Yet, in this world, and especially this nation, instead of entering through the lowest place by sacrificially giving our lives to serve others, many people,

even in the Church, have grown accustomed to being served at the head table. Jesus told us that'd happen in the world, but remember, He said that *"it shall not be so among you."* We are those commanded to *"go and sit down in the lowest place,"* to offer ourselves, our souls and bodies as a *"living sacrifice"* (Romans 12:1), to take up our *"cross daily"* (Luke 9:23), those who are called not to be served, but to serve, to lay down our lives for our Friend. St. Peter said it this way, *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His footsteps"* (1 Peter 2:21).

We are called to follow in the footsteps of our Lord, to follow Him by placing our feet where His were, and while walking that path, the lowest path, will lead to difficulty, affliction, and sacrifice, we find grace and peace and rest in the knowledge that His footsteps will one day lead us to Him. The lowest path leads to the highest place. Our Lord calls us to the Cross, that He may lead us to His throne.