



ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THIS SUNDAY September 1 & BEYOND”

“Social Grace, Kingdom Style”



We invite you to come to Church. You may sit in any pew. Please be prepared to have someone say to you, “Excuse me, I believe that’s my seat you are sitting in.”

I’ve actually witnessed it myself; I’ve seen it way too often happen like that. The leadership of a congregation will make the public invitation to “sit wherever you’d like”; the person who usually sits in that spot has not paid attention to the memorandum. Awkward moment. Sometimes made so embarrassing that you decide to leave or never come back to “such an unwelcoming congregation.” Mind you, there are plenty of other parishioners who would simply go to another pew being thankful for those new people sitting where they usually do. If you come, and that happens, please forgive that person who seems to be saying they “own” that seat; who knows what has already happened poorly in their life earlier that morning. And please realize that most anybody else who has just witnessed such self-serving entitlement will themselves be very embarrassed, and most likely say something apologetic before the morning is over.

In the good news reading from Luke on Sunday, you will hear a story about seating etiquette, and, of course, how Jesus intends that story as an object lesson to describe the workings of the Kingdom of God.

You can't escape seeing the mastery of Jesus' teaching throughout the four Gospels in regard to cultural etiquette and the Kingdom of God. Well, after all, he is God. But he is SO good at it. He sees something (like I have and like we all may have), he gets poked by it (you might say irritated by what he witnessed) and then speaks up aloud to point out what happened, what should have happened, and how it is intimately tied in to the values, the priorities, and the mission of God, and of the those who desire to come into God's presence.

And so many times he's done it before you can say, "Where's my wine?"

As we hear the story, though, we very quickly realize that he's not talking to the Pharisee leader to whose house Jesus has been invited to have lunch. He's not telling the host that he didn't treat him (Jesus) right in where or where not Jesus could sit. He's not telling the Pharisee host that all his Pharisee buddies he's also invited to lunch are not treating others with hospitality.

So what's the deal here? It's actually a story pointed at the guests who have entered the dining hall and its about THEIR self-serving entitlement, and their risk of being embarrassed in front of everybody by choosing a seat at the table that implies they are more honored in the host's eyes than what the host actually sees.

Jesus is going to teach them Kingdom etiquette (which they should have known already – it would be no secret from the scriptures), and he's going to do it appealing to their own desire not to do something that could potentially be awkward or embarrassing for them.

Etiquette is a set of specific rules designed to ensure polite behavior in a group or within a culture. Part of being properly socialized within a culture is learning what that culture considers acceptable behavior in dining, conversation, and attire. SOUTHERN etiquette takes that concept and puts it on steroids; if you don't follow "proper" etiquette you can often be ostracized.

I think Kingdom of God etiquette teaches us how to be more like Jesus. So, we do want to pay attention here. And what is that basis for Kingdom of God etiquette? Because as sure as anything, proper etiquette will be ultimately different between the Kingdom of this world, and the Kingdom of God.

In an interesting corollary to this story of a lunch, St. Paul says that the basic standard for Christian behavior is “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (First Corinthians 10:31) It is our Kingdom etiquette goal to honor the Lord in every way. Whether sitting in a church service, shopping at the mall, or working at our jobs, we can do so for the glory of God. When we carry the reputation of Jesus with us, our behavior affects the way others see Him.

Here’s the thing. The story we will hear speaks not of rude and uncivilized behavior, particularly, but the UNINVITED behavior of believing you are more “than that.” To honor the Lord so often means to humble ourselves.

You know, the folks who set up the luncheon Jesus attended could have taken care of this whole embarrassing kerfuffle if they had been organized enough to provide place cards with people’s names on them! But without the nametags, the Christian does the next best thing: they choose a seat far less in importance than they might possibly think that others might think of them. Its more than etiquette usually teaches: it is the will and the art of being humble. Of not honoring yourself; placing yourself less even if you ARE honored more than others! But certainly not to act like these presumptive guests.

Reminds me of walking in the woods and suddenly having an uninvited swarm of gnats and mosquitos flying around my head. They can come along if they like. But presuming to fly so close into my face and ears means hearing me tell them to move! Or be swatted. I don’t think they care. But WE are supposed to care about Kingdom etiquette, which does well – if not surprisingly – in our earthly social circles.

Jesus would teach that If you are to do all for the glory of God, then that displaces our own desire, even self-entitlement to receive our own honor and glory. Jesus lived it out. And he taught it about himself, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.”

By the way, if you are coming to church for the first time, just ask the greeter or usher where to sit in a seat not already “claimed.” And they will smile knowingly and lead you in.

Fr. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector

Readings for this Sunday – The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Wisdom of ben Sirach (aka Ecclesiasticus) 10:7-18 Psalm 112 Hebrews 13:1-8

Luke 14:1, 7-14

CALENDAR

SUNDAY: Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

8:30a Low Mass (Church)

10:30a Solemn Mass (Church)

AA Meeting

7:00p Little Apple Group (Parish Hall)

—The entrance to the church is on 6th Avenue—

Note: Coffee Hour & Fellowship follow the Mass in the Parish Hall.

TUESDAY: Noon Mass (St. Mary's Chapel)

FRIDAY AA Meetings

8:00p Ladies' Group (Fireside Room)

8:15p Men's Group (Parish Hall)

SATURDAY Societies of Mary Day of Devotion

11:00am Rosary (St. Mary Chapel)

11:30am Mass (St. Mary Chapel)

Noon Potluck Lunch (Parish Hall)

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10:30am Solemn Mass (Church)

AA Meeting

7:00p Little Apple Group (Parish Hall)