

Luke 14:1-14

The Challenge and the Rewards of Humbling Ourselves

I am amazed at how the timing of this passage has landed for us today, in light of the time of the year we are in and therefore what God has potentially laid out for us in the year ahead. Next week we have an important service. We will lay the year ahead of us before the Lord, commission our ministry leaders, worship and pray, and we will remind each other of the plans and priorities God has set before us. In particular – what is very much on my heart for 2023, local mission.

With that in mind, there is a very important passage of scripture we have arrived at this morning. For all of the detail we have prepared in our Vision plan for the year – all the other important areas notwithstanding – it should come as no surprise to us that the bible makes clear what our mission is...*plain and clear...*

Matt. 28:19, 20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

There are many other things we are called to do in scripture, and how we are to do them, and for whom we are to do them. However, all of this, is well summarised in Jesus' commission in Matt. 28:

- a. Make disciples of all people – anyone and everyone...
- b. Baptise them
- c. Teach them

This commission has no 'full-stop'. It is effective till the task is completed. This commission in many respects removes the pressure of knowing what we must do with our time, with our gifts and with our resources....in the 336 days remaining of this year!

What we must do, Jesus has made abundantly clear. How we go about doing what he has called us to makes the decisive difference between being *passive* or *proactive* in his commission.

That how, is found in this amazing account of Luke 14. The scene is that Jesus is in the home of a leading Pharisee, and there are two things happening: One – Jesus heals another person on the Sabbath (the last time was back in Ch.13 with the bent over woman); secondly – Jesus gives the people there a lesson on the importance of *how* you do a meal. But is it? There are lessons on hospitality here, and when we read the scripture shortly you might think, hang on Ross, this is about the meal. However, the meal, is merely the means for Jesus to engage them in a much deeper issue.

We'll discover you can have all the knowledge (NB: prominent Pharisee...), all the funds, all the gifts, all the flash plans and all the intent...but if our hearts are full of *self*, and not *Christ-glorifying humility*, that, has a profound effect on Jesus' commission for us.

Jesus shows us in the healing, and the parable, *how* we genuinely relate toward others in a needy world. *Humbling ourselves* is needed to see others with compassion. *Humbling ourselves* is needed to put others needs above our own. *Humility* is needed for mission.

(READ) *One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ² There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. ³ Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" ⁴ But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. ⁵ Then he asked them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?" ⁶ And they had nothing to say.*

⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹ For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Isn't this an amazing passage of scripture?! Before I continue with what Jesus teaches us in Luke 14 I want you to see that this theme – **humbling ourselves and putting others first** – is across the entire NT.... stay with me as I give you a number of verses...

Mark 9:35 *Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."*

John 3:30 *He must become greater; I must become less*

John 15:12, 13 *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

Phil. 2:3, 4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

Gal. 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*

This is a brief sampling... and they teach us that:

- a. He gave *everything* for us, we give *everything* for him.
- b. We value others above ourselves
- c. We humble ourselves...so he might lift us up
 - a. ***1Humbling ourselves and putting others first*** – are the key ingredients required of the heart, in Jesus' commission for us. With that in mind, let's go to our main passage...

The Challenge of Humbling Ourselves

The scene is a dinner party. On this occasion a special dinner party, much like a wedding feast. And Jesus, was there. And we know wherever Jesus goes he is about his Father's business and there will be gospel opportunities. The room is full of dignitaries, it's the Sabbath, and the man with the swelling (dropsy) is there. On first glance we might think this has got to be a setup of epic proportions². These guys had probably invited Jesus to their fancy lunch, with the unwell man (possibly terminal ill), under the pretence of setting him up for a fall. But Jesus is never caught off-guard!

There is a sense in which Jesus is saying to the "*prominent Pharisee*", his peers, and everyone gathered there, "I know you guys have your plans, you're quite used to this way of doing things, but you've got it all back-to-front. (V. 1) You've been *carefully watching* me, I know. But (v.7) I've been observing what you've been doing, too and I'm here to turn this little party on its head and tell you how things ought to be done..."

Here's the 1st challenge...

*"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"*⁴...they remained silent. Undeterred by their silence and because Jesus is answerable to no man...

*...taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.*⁵

Their silence doesn't stop Jesus asking them a second question (v. 5) "*If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?*"⁶ Of course the answer is yes, he's seen them doing them it!

(P) Now wouldn't it have been amazing for Luke to record that one of the leaders stepped forward and said "*you know what fellas we should not have done this, we're sorry Jesus...*"

But, for the 2nd time...*they had nothing to say.*

It's an ugly thing isn't it, albeit subtle, but despite their silence, their hypocrisy is deafening. They can't see it in themselves, but it's apparent.

¹ Giving everything, dying, valuing others and humbling ourselves

² Because of what the detailed interactions Luke has already given us.

Twice they had nothing to say, and the inference Jesus leaves the Pharisees and law experts with is that out of a selfish preoccupation for their own welfare, they conveniently shift the goal posts³ when it comes to the safety of their children and oxen. In other words, the Bible is black and white for this situation today and yet tomorrow, it's very grey. No consistency. The rules were conveniently flexible yesterday and today (due to inconvenience) they're rigid! The law – the word of God – wasn't the issue here, it was there hypocrisy, hard hearts and selfishness⁴. The complete opposite to the *humility* required to show empathy and compassion⁵.

Now it might be – and I'm thinking ahead to Luke 18 now – we say *"God, I thank you that I'm not like that, that I am not like other people—those people down the street, those neighbours, that person in our small group...God I thank you I have no pretences"*

Do we believe one thing, yet do something completely different for the purposes of keeping up appearances? Do we proclaim the hard truths of God yet when faced with applying those in a difficult situation, run for the hills⁶? Do we shift the goal posts of scriptural truth as a matter of convenience? Having the kinds of hypocrisies⁷ the religious leaders were guilty of – as part of us – are just one of the challenges we face in *humbling ourselves...*

Through Luke's recorded repetition of these encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders, for all the power of God they have witnessed, for all the compassion they've witnessed, for the humility of Jesus they've witnessed, they're not getting it⁸. They remain unrepentant, uncompassionate to need around them, filled with blindness, hardheartedness and, hypocrisy. (P) These are the challenges *we face* in humbling ourselves.

Here's the 2nd challenge...

The man Jesus has healed has no longer left the room, and everybody's asked to grab a seat. Many of you have quite possibly been at an event and you're asked to wait outside, but you've had a peep through the door, you have a fair idea where the important people are sitting, or where the buffet is and you devise a cunning plan.... then you're invited in, only to find they've put those little name cards on the tables leaving you in the furthest corner from the special guest and even further from the buffet.

You might be ok with that but others are sneakily swapping cards around so they get a better place...and you overhear husbands saying to wives (or opp.)

"look at where they seated us honey, is this the best they could do, surely we deserve to sit nearer the guest of honour?"

³ Of care or compassion for others...

⁴ Discrimination...

⁵ No humility = no compassion.

⁶ Are we hard on the truth when surrounded by like-minded believers and soft on the truth with unbelievers?

⁷ ...that prevent us from valuing others, that prevent us from delivering on the compassion of Jesus...

⁸ Think of the graciousness and mercy of God to the people of Israel...

Now there will have been a lot more commotion than that in the Pharisees home. Dining then wasn't sitting up in chairs like we do, they would lay down on couches, that were set up in "U" shape, 2 -3 people to a couch, leaning on their elbows. Similar to the set up at a wedding reception the "head of the table" was the couch at one end with others extending from it (pic?). And the places of "honor" (v. 8), were those nearest the head of the table.⁹

And Jesus notices everything that's happening. And he says (ref. 7-10) "ok, now we've got a second matter we need to talk about. What's all this pushing and shoving and taking the good seats off of others all about? Don't take the place of honour, someone more important than you may come. Save yourself the embarrassment, take the lowest seat and the host may upgrade you.

Jesus is not just talking about table etiquette, there's a deeper principle here. *Exalting ourselves above others*. Because Jesus recognised here and in us, that we can 'tend', to seek what is best for us, me, myself, first. There's something ingrained in us that's wants the best "seats", at the expense of others.

I recognised this very thing, in myself when many years ago our son and I were upgraded to business class on a trip to Australia. Thinking boy how much we deserved this, of all the flights we've been on, contorted in those seats. So there we were, very 'proud and smug' clunking our orange juice glasses and high-fiving looking back at everyone else feeling pretty good about ourselves. Although here, we were offered these seats by our host I knew that my attitude was wrong and we were only there because the air nz 'host' moved us up.

What Jesus is teaching actually applies to whatever "seat" we are in. It can seem like we're humbling ourselves sitting in row 199e instead of 1a, in the back, darkest dingiest corner, but all the while still have a self-first attitude about what we're doing, i.e. "I hope everyone notices how humble I am"¹⁰! Self, above others is a challenge.

That is what Jesus is teaching as he uses the setting of a dinner and the bad attitude of the Pharisees to demonstrate the very opposite of what they're doing, is what is required in how we treat others as a principle of life¹¹. And though its entirely possibly a host can do precisely what Jesus says here, demote you or upgrade you, what he actually means is that it is God who provides a seat at "the table" for you, how he wants, when he wants and where he wants in the kingdom of God (all about our hearts!). *With God* we have no ability to cheat the system. *With God* there is no such thing as thinking we deserve a greater seat, or thinking higher of ourselves than we actually are. Doing that comes with great risk....

...¹¹ *For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled...*

⁹ Walter L. Liefeld, 976.

¹⁰ Just cancelled out your humbleness

¹¹ All of life!

I cannot tell you exactly what God will do here, except that the scripture is clear: if we exalt ourselves in pride, elevating our own greatness, God will humble us. Because power, control, reliance on self, ego and worldly standards of greatness...and Jesus' call to humble ourselves, *don't co-exist*.

Being "great" for God is taking the low position. The message of self and being great is what we are constantly bombarded with by the world; exalt self! Make a name for yourself, Jesus says no, humble yourself and make a name for me.

Humility is in the hearts of those (only) who know how to empty themselves, of all of themselves, for all that is of Christ, and for the love and benefit of others.

...one last (3rd) challenge... *servicing others with our time and resources*

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Here's a great example to use for those who say they apply the Bible literally. Ok let's do that here. Jesus said...don't invite your friends, etc. But is that literally what Jesus wants us to do, today? Could be. But the answer is no. When Jesus says don't store up treasure on earth, should we close our bank accounts and give it all away? No.

Jesus is saying it's no problem to invite your mates or those well-known to you, but there is *greater eternal reward* to come from mirroring the compassion, empathy and humility of Jesus in serving those you don't know, those you'd never ordinarily befriend and those who are in need of the love of Christ shown through you. It's risky, puts a lump in some of our throats, but it's what honours Christ.

God cares about what we've got, but he cares an awful lot more about what we do with it and how we use it. The principle from the text is we're to *serve others, with our time and resources, for no reward*. Using what you have to make a statement, at every opportunity, about who provides for you and who you are serving with it: **God**. This applies individually, but also corporately.

To that end a good litmus test for this principle as a church, is to look at: how much of our ministry includes those who physically cannot do much or offer much, but we legitimize their place among us anyway? How much of our ministry – both in our time and resources – is outwardly directed as opposed to self-serving?

Sending blankets to those who have no resources, that's taking the seat at the end, giving others the seat of honour...sending hundreds of sanitary kits off shore...1000's of meals produced out of that kitchen...

...every Monday night young people exposed to life skills from a biblical perspective...we work with those who are going through the darkest of seasons in suicide loss...do more? Yes...

From today's passage I've given you 3 challenges we all face when it comes to *humbling ourselves*:

1st challenge... *Dealing with our hypocrisy*

2nd challenge... *Exalting ourselves above others*

3rd challenge... *serving others (with our time and resources) for no reward*

But, then Jesus also explains within this passage there are *rewards for humbling ourselves*.

The Reward (blessing) of Humbling Ourselves

Now, it's important we understand here, that though there are rewards,¹² it is not or ever the rewards we seek; we've just talked about serving others for no reward. It is Glorifying Christ and in all we do reflecting his attitude in the cross, we seek. It is that we humble ourselves for no other reason than Christ has paid the price for my sin and I am forever grateful. That is enough reward¹³...

Before I give you four rewards, noted right there in the text, let's review quickly where the *rewards of humbling ourselves* come from:

- a. Taking the 'lowest place' (v.10)
- b. Humbling ourselves (v.11)
- c. Serving those who cannot give, or are completely unable to offer us anything in return (v.12)
- d. Serving those who are way outside our comfort zone; those we'd never dream of inviting (v.12)
- e. Expecting nothing in return (v.14)

What are those rewards according to what Jesus says?

- a. Honoured (v.10) ... *'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests.*
- b. Exalted (v.11) ...*those who humble themselves will be exalted."*
- c. Blessing (v.14) ...*when you give a banquet...you will be blessed"*
- d. Repayment at resurrection (v.14) ... *Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

Have we heard what Jesus is teaching in this passage this morning? Look at how he responded to the man. Listen to what he said to the religious leaders. Their response was silence, no comment. No change. *How will we respond?*

¹² I cannot tell you fully what those rewards look like

¹³ But there are rewards, eternal rewards. And I hope we'll be surprised, in a good way, when we enter heaven. What are sending ahead? When we serve others and engage in Jesus mission for others what are sending ahead? When you read 1 Cor. 3 you'll see there's 2 distinct groupings of materials: Gold, silver and costly stones, or, wood, hay or straw (v.12)?

Folks, let me tell you, that you will know the areas of your life that are a *challenge* when it comes to humbling yourself. But what an exciting prospect – when we – with the help of the Holy Spirit – are able to turn that around. Wow!

I mainly have in mind the effects *Humbling ourselves* will have, for mission. But ***this*** can bring renewal to all and everything we do. Relationships, family, friends, our marriages...

James 4:6-10 *"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

We've talked about the challenges of humbling ourselves, but also that there are tremendous rewards *when we do*. *When we do!* We can learn the lessons from what Jesus has said to the religious leaders.

In order for there to be God-glorifying humbling of ourselves, we need to find ourselves deeply impacted again by the love of God for us, in Christ. In order for our unity to be further strengthened, for us to grow spiritually, grow as a church, and purposefully reach into this community, requires the humility of Jesus. In order to deliver on Jesus' mission for us, requires us to see people's needs and place others above ourselves.

And that is why I submit to you today, with 2023 ahead of us, *humbling ourselves* is crucial for what God has ahead of us.

Humbling ourselves means emptying ourselves of all that is of me, for all that is of Christ. That's what exalts Christ. And that's when God will exalt you!

As we come to the Lords table this morning, and we worship, and *we remember Jesus*, who *"humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"*, what do we need to empty ourselves of to be full of him, full of his Spirit, full of the motivation we need to fulfil his commission for us?