

15 Pentecost

Year C

1 Sept 2013

This last week, as I was praying over today's readings, I noticed a little detail that surprised me. You see, up until this last week, I could've sworn that Jesus was providing good practical advice for living as a Christian - good practical advice when he tells us to "not sit down in the place of honor, ...[but] to 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 honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you."

It seems to be good practical advice, doesn't it?

But, this last week I noticed, really noticed and began to wonder about the fact that it was practical advice at all - it is another one of his parables.

But, it seems so practical that it's really difficult - at least for me - to begin to understand it as a parable.

Now, one thing we know about parables is that they are supposed to evoke an image of God's justice - an image of the way God wants the world to be.

Now, it's not that big a surprise that Jesus would use the image of a wedding party as part of a parable for God's kingdom. He does it so often... he uses that precise image so often that it probably ought to be our main image of God's intention for creation.

I guess the problem for me comes in with thinking of there being seats that are more honorable and seats that are less honorable in that wonderful wedding banquet.

I don't know, but I definitely have to do more thinking about that.

Still, it's abundantly clear in this world of ours that there are seats, places, of more honor and places of much less honor.

And so, whatever it might mean that God's kingdom is like a wedding banquet in which people seek out the least honorable seats, it's abundantly clear that in this world of ours, folks are placed in seats of greater and lesser honor. Moreover, it's abundantly clear - all you have to do is what most any "reality show" or celebrity talk show - but lots of folks seek the most honorable places.

Lots of folks seek the limelight, the spotlight, or whatever other kind of "light" you want to call it.

It seems that humility has become a long lost, long forgotten quality - a quality of being in which precious few people strive for or honor.

I'm afraid that for most people, humility has become completely synonymous with humiliation. Now, there is the real work of Satan - the real work of the accuser - to take such a precious quality as humility and twist to so much that the world scoffs and jeers at it.

If we in the church do not embrace humility, then who in the world will?

But, you see, I'm afraid that so much, too much, of the world has come into the church.

You see, earlier this week, I had a very interesting conversation with a parishioner.

The other day, someone asked me a very good question.

They asked, "How is it that with every other community service group, the people all generally get along really well, but with the church, it's just so easy for someone to make someone else angry? That is, why do so many people in the church go off on ego trips and stake out territory and alienate others when other community service groups just don't act that way?"

Now, first off, I have to plead a good deal of ignorance. I've never been a part of any community service group for very long. I've attended a few Sertoma and Rotary meetings and a few other groups which had community service days.

But, I have to say, even from my small bit of experience, I still have a good idea what the parishioner was getting at. The service groups I've seen have had an atmosphere of cooperation and a spirit of teamwork that sometimes does seem to be lacking in some of our church activities.

One other thing I noticed pretty quickly was that Sertoma and Rotary had no hesitation at all to let their members know that they needed money for their projects.

In fact, at one Rotary meeting I went to years ago, it seemed the members just couldn't get rid of their money fast enough. Now, that would make for a pretty interesting offertory collection! I'd love to know how to bottle that attitude up and spread it around!

Just as a sidenote, it seemed really strange to me that the church could so easily get a bad reputation about talking about money, when it was almost the whole focus of the meetings of the other groups.

Be that as it may, the sad fact does remain that that these other service groups seem to get along so much better than our churches do sometimes.

You probably won't be too surprised, but I do have a few suggestions why that might be.

Actually, I can boil it all down to one simple thing - the church and our life in Christ is simply much more personal than any work we do with other community service groups. While we may find satisfaction and fulfillment in doing the good work of these other service groups, it's only in the church that we find our entire lives defined. Our relationship with God touches us at the very core of our being.

Whereas many people spend a great number of years working in a service group, in the church it's entirely possible for someone to be a link in a long family chain of birth, life and death - generation after generation, expressing their hope and faith in God's work in creation.

But, what we do, week after week, is remember the power of God - all that God has done for creation and all that God has done for us. As often as possible we read God's word, we share in some ancient and some modern prayers, and as often as we can, we share in communion - in the mystical communion with our Lord Jesus Christ, our creator God and our sanctifier the Holy Spirit.

That sort of power... that sort of energy, can sometimes get out of hand. And when it does, serious problems arise - all too often, Christians don't treat each other very Christianly. Feelings get hurt. Egos can get out of control.

What that says to us and about us is that we are still human - still fallible human beings.

What it demands of us, however, is that we remember that we are also Christians - that we have to seek reconciliation with those

around us.

Finally, today, though, I'd like to suggest one other thing. I think something we find all through the New Testament might finally make a great deal of sense. You see, when we begin to appreciate the problem of Christians not acting very Christianly, maybe we come to really appreciate why so many of the books and letters of the New Testament tell believers to love one another.

Today's passage from Hebrews is just one of many, many statements to love one another. I can only imagine that it's always been difficult to be a good Christian - always difficult to live in peace and concord in a Christian community. And so, time and time again, we have to always be reminded - love one another. Love one another. For the sake of Jesus Christ, our redeemer, love one another. Amen.