

## "We Know Where We Stand"

Text: Luke 14:1-14

8-29-2010

A couple of months ago my family and I went to a wedding in southern Indiana. The groom was the son of a couple with whom we have a close friendship, and so we very much looked forward to attending the wedding and celebrating with them. When we walked into the reception hall after the wedding, though, we discovered that we had been placed at a table near the very back of the hall; we were seated so far in the back we had a hard time even seeing the head table. I have to admit that, at first, I was taken back. I wondered if I had the "standing" with these people that I thought I had. I felt a 'bit slighted. But by the end of the evening it was clear that no slight was intended, as we ended up at the "front" of the hall, celebrating with our friends at the very center of the party, well into the night (our Christopher was even the life of the party for a while, wowing people on the dance floor with his fancy moves).

I thought of that this week as I read through today's Gospel in preparation for this week's message, for in it Jesus speaks of where to sit at a wedding feast. He says that it's better to seat yourself in a lower place at the start, so that you can then be exalted to a higher place at the end, which Jesus says we will be on the Last Day. Basically what Jesus says is that, since we know where we stand with God, we can let Him worry about where we should sit, trusting that He will exalt us to our proper place at the End. Let's look a little closer at that now, together.

As we do, we return to today's Gospel, where our Lord says:

"When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you: 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in 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 table with you."(Luke 14:8-10)

Jesus spoke those words at the house of a ruler of the pharisees, who had invited him to dinner. At the dinner there was a man who was suffering from what Luke calls dropsy - more commonly referred to today as edema, a disease that causes excessive swelling in various parts of the body . Jesus healed the man, but not before asking his host, along with the other pharisees and scribes who were at the dinner, whether or not it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. After they failed to answer Jesus, He healed the man. And He then asked them another question, saying:

"Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?"(v.5)

Luke writes that:

" ... they could not reply to these things."(v.6)

And after that, Luke says that Jesus spoke to them the words we opened up with, with Jesus instructing them on where to seat themselves at a wedding feast. The point of Jesus' instruction is that you don't want to think too highly of yourself, in terms of your standing with your host, for he may seat you in a less honorable place than you think you deserve. Better to assume a lowly place, and let your host affirm your standing with him on his own.

Now, why would Jesus provide such teaching after having healed a man with dropsy? The answer? = Because the Pharisees had an inflated view of themselves and their importance. Remember, they were the so-called religious leaders of the day, and as such, they were thought fairly highly of by those endeavoring to be faithful to the Jewish religion. They spent a great deal of time studying the Old Testament Scriptures, especially those designated as scribes or lawyers; they took very seriously the words of Moses in the Torah.

Of course, that would've been well and good, if it weren't for the fact that they often interpreted those words in a much more stringent manner than had been originally intended. Their interpretation and application of the Scriptures made it hard for people to be faithful to God's Word, and they loved it when people looked up *to them* for their supposed faithfulness. They kept a close watch on people, setting *themselves* up as the standard of measurement.

They certainly kept a close watch on Jesus. Luke even says that as Jesus dined:

" ... they were watching Him **carefully**."(v.1)

That would be reminiscent of another time when Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath - back in Luke 6, where Jesus healed a man with a withered hand, and Luke says that, on that occasion, the scribes and the pharisees:

" ... watched Him, to see whether He would heal on the Sabbath, ..."  
(6:7a)

Here in Luke 14 they watched Jesus again, carefully. Jesus knew that, and with His act of healing the man with dropsy, as well as with His teaching on where to sit at a wedding feast, Jesus showed them that the standard of measurement which was their example of living the godly life was NOT very honorable. Their standing with God was anything *but* secure.

The reason for that was that they didn't know Jesus. They did NOT follow Him in faith, but instead, as Luke tells us back in that earlier passage from chapter 6 of his Gospel:

" ... they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."(v.11)

They didn't understand what the Sabbath was about, because they didn't understand God's love - evidenced by their disapproval of Jesus' Sabbath healings (and by the way, there are three such healings in Luke's Gospel, and in all three the scribes and Pharisees get upset with Jesus). They thought they knew where they stood with God, but they didn't.

But we do. We know where we stand with God because we know His Son: the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that He gave Himself into death on a cross for our every sin, and that because He lives we too will live, forever, in the glories of His New Creation. The Lord Jesus came to heal

every disease and cure every sickness; He came to lift us up from our fallenness and restore us to the goodness God intended when He created us. That He did when He payed for our sins in His death on the cross, and then rose again from the dead on Easter. And that He continues to do every time He forgives our sins with His Word of Absolution, and joins us to Himself in the eating and drinking of His Body and His Blood. Jesus says to us in today's Gospel:

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."(v.11)

*Jesus humbled Himself* on the most humiliating thing imaginable: a cross, there taking the lowest place possible, hanging naked and in shame. He did that so that we could be moved up to a higher place at the feast of His eternal Reign - the feast of God. Because of Jesus' humbling of Himself, we know that we will be exalted to the very highest place on the Last Day. Knowing that, we know where we stand with God.

That's why we exalt ourselves: we don't want to lose our standing; we don't want to lose out on anything that might be coming to us. It's like it was with that wedding I opened up with - I was afraid there wouldn't be enough food, or wedding cake; I was afraid we were so far back we wouldn't get to visit the people we'd come to see. But there was more than enough food, and more than enough cake, and we spent plenty of time into the wee hours of the morning with those we loved. So it is with God: We will spend eternity with the One Who loved us even unto death; our standing with Him is secure.

That, of course, has an effect on how we live life. Jesus says as much in today' s Gospel when He says that, if we want to be exalted in the End, then we need to humble ourselves now. The way to do that is by focusing on others more than we do on ourselves; the way to be humble is to love.

Jesus exemplified that. In fact, in all three of those instances in Luke's Gospel where Jesus heals someone on the Sabbath, He takes the initiative with each of them and, in healing them, shows them love. He knew it would cause trouble with the authorities for Him to do that; He knew it would lead to His eventual demise. But what mattered to Him was loving this world and those in it. What mattered to Jesus was healing people of their brokenness, restoring them to God's goodness. What mattered to Jesus was securing *our* standing with God.

The same goes for us today. We are the "first fruits," if you will, of God' s New Creation. As we live life "new" in this very "old" world, we often feel as though we're last in line (something we heard about in last week's Gospel). During those times it can feel as though we possess a pretty low standing in the eyes of others; it can feel as if we don't really matter. What today's Gospel shows us is that we *do* matter - to God. Because of Jesus, we know where we stand with God. And so we can now live life new and improved, not worrying about ourselves but about others, doing for them as our Lord has done for us. We live like that knowing that on the Last Day we will be given the highest standing possible, being taken *by God* from last to first.

And on that note we conclude. Ya know, it's a freeing thing to live for others; to not have to worry all the time about whether or not you're getting what you deserve. It's freeing to NOT have to worry about your standing in life, helping others instead improve theirs. We do that by bringing

people to Jesus. God grant us that kind of life - a life that is always and only focused on Jesus. In Him we all know where we stand with God -

- In Jesus' ✠ Name,

Amen!