

“Humility and Honor” – Luke 14:1,7-14 (August 28, 2016)
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The Text from the Inclusive Bible:

One Sabbath, when Jesus came to eat a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees, the guests watched him closely.

Jesus went on to address a parable to the guests, noticing how they were trying to get a place of honor at the table.

“When you’re invited to a wedding party, don’t sit in the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished has been invited. Otherwise the hosts might come and say to you, ‘Make room for this person,’ and you would have to proceed shamefacedly to the lowest place. What you should do is go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your hosts approach you they’ll say, ‘My friend, come up higher.’ This will win you the esteem of the other guests. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Then Jesus said to the host, “Whenever you give a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends or colleagues or relatives or wealthy neighbors. They might invite you in return and thus repay you. No, when you have a reception, invite those who are poor or have physical infirmities or are blind. You should be pleased that they can’t repay you, for you’ll be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

The Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

Oh boy. I kind of feel like this reads like a ‘Dear Jesus’ advice column in the Times. “Dear Jesus, I love to go to dinner parties, but I’m kind of an introvert and I never know where to sit. Can you help me? Signed, Tired of Standing in Seattle.”

“Dear tired of standing in Seattle: Don’t sit at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished has been invited...”

Now here’s the really hard part: “Whenever you give a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends or colleagues or relatives or wealthy neighbors... Invite the poor. You should be pleased that they can’t repay you.” It’s not about repayment. Jesus explains that this is, in part, how both humility and honor work.

I feel like one of those late night hosts like Trevor Noah or John Stewart would have a field day with this text and the current state of Christianity in our nation. Far too

often, we've become a tradition that offers mandates that sound a little too much like:
"Do as I say, not as I do..."

Which speaks to where we are in a lot of ways these days – in the religious, the political, and the social realms of cultural discourse. Because discourse isn't really discourse at all anymore; instead, discourse has given way to discord. Far too often, the discord is most present in the way that we *choose* to shame each other.

The shame game is a public event – it was practically a Gold Medal event at the Olympics this year. We saw how Muslim women were shamed for their Olympic attire in competition – since then, we've seen Muslim women shamed for their attire at beaches.

Shame has played a prominent role in political debates, too – the way an opponent's face looks, or the way they talk, or the size of their hands. This shaming rarely – no: *never* – this shaming *never* actually gets us to a place where we can debate real issues with concrete solutions.

These political moments, weighted by the constant interplay of the shame-game suck us in and make us want to either recoil in horror or... quite often, get in on the game ourselves. How many of us gleefully snapped pictures of that statue of a naked Donald Trump when it first appeared on Capitol Hill, only to realize that we were playing by a set of rules to a game that we should never have joined in the first place? ... That to shame the nude figure of a fellow human isn't any way to honor another or ourselves?

Shame is so pervasive that it distorts us and our ability to act with the humility that Jesus calls us into.

Shame has played a role in religious affairs, too. I've mentioned it before, but honestly I want to scream when I hear another Christian say, "Well, Ned, we sure do love

the sinner, but we hate the sin.” No. I’m sorry, but, no. Because far too often these very same folks who claim to hate the “sin,” then wrap up their notion of that “sin” with the very identity of the person whom they call the “sinner.” In so doing, they basically say that, yes, the “sinner” is to be hated. And frankly, that’s a shame game – or something way more nefarious.

(And it’s terrible theology, but we’re talking about shame right now.)

Where does shame get us? Honestly, where does shame lead. Shame leads to more shame. Shame begets shame begets shame.

In this passage today, Jesus calls us to act in humility. It’s not a passage about proper dinner etiquette or even simple table manners (sorry, Tired of Standing in Seattle). It’s a passage about practicing humility and honor. And despite what you see playing out on the news, humility is not – I repeat is not: humiliation. Humility is not about being humiliated, or about humiliating – shaming – another.

If Christians are called to be countercultural – to call out the problematic norms of our day – which is what Jesus suggests in this passage about honor... then to be countercultural means opting out of the shame-game. Amen?

Jesus calls us to honor each other. As I’ve described, when talking about honor, we tend to talk about honor and its *converse*: shame. But I want to talk about honor and its *partner*: humility.

In this passage, Jesus described humility as the way we carry *ourselves*, and he describes honor as the way we uphold *others*. If we confuse or conflate them, and honor *ourselves instead of or above* others, then we’re not really able to honor them at all. So,

we learn to act in humility in order to live lives of compassion. We work to be humble in order to offer proper honor.

How do we talk about these two together? How is it they go hand in hand?

Many of you met Michelle's dad, Ray, when her parents were visiting this past Christmas. When Michelle was growing up, her dad used to say to her, "You know, Michelle, there isn't a single person on this planet – not one – who can't teach you something. Something about yourself. Something about the world. Something about life. There isn't one person in this world who can't teach you something." This is deep wisdom and a great recognition about everyone and anyone we meet on a given day. This is about living in humility and honoring others. It's a beautiful way of interacting with the world... and it's also a challenging way.

I know there are some folks that I would find pretty difficult to "learn something about the world from," but that – in and of itself – should teach me something... about me. And maybe, just maybe, that's a pretty tough lesson to learn about myself all on its own.

Jesus calls us to honor those who are different than we are – to honor those who can't even pay us back. Jesus whose family has had some experience being dishonored – humiliated. Think back with me to the very first chapter of Luke and the infancy narrative there. Luke writes, "While Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary's delivery. She gave birth to her firstborn, a son; she put him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them at the inn." It's not that there was *no room* at the inn. There was no room *for them* at the inn – their kind, those country folk, those people from out of town...

Even in the very first chapter of his gospel, Luke begins to challenge us to think about humility and humiliation – shame and honor. We should ask ourselves as these stories unfold: What would we do? How would we respond?

What if Ray Horsley had been able to give that innkeeper the same advice he gave Michelle when she was growing up: “There isn’t a single person on this planet who can’t teach you something. Even someone from a little town like Nazareth has something to share...” Would the innkeeper have humbled himself enough to welcome these strangers and to honor them enough to give them a room to sleep in?

What would we do? Luke asks us to ask ourselves these questions.

What does humility *mean*? What does humility mean to us?

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Human, humility, hummus all come from the same root. From the Latin: humi. “From the dirt.” I know we just talked about Christmas, AND we sang an Easter hymn earlier, and I promise I’m not intentionally taking us on a whirlwind through ALL of the Liturgical seasons, but this reminds me of our Ash Wednesday services here at First Baptist. As a pastor, I think Ash Wednesday is one of the most special moments I get to share with members of this congregation. The pastors stand here at the front of the sanctuary and you come forward and – one at a time – we touch your foreheads with that ash. As we hold your heads in our hands, we look into each other’s eyes and say, “From the dust – the humus – of the earth you came, and to the dust – the humus – will you return. You are a blessing on earth, a blessing of earth.”

It is the honoring and recognition of a shared humanity – a shared humility. It’s a sacred and profound moment. I’m always thankful that we get to share it together.

Humility isn't about thinking less of yourself – and it's certainly not about allowing those moments that others shame you to rule your life. Humility is recognizing that we all start from the same place – that we are all beautiful and beloved children of God...

You know that you're beautiful and beloved, right? You know that you're beautiful and beloved, right?

You are beautiful. Say, "I am beautiful."

You are beloved. Say, "I am beloved."

We can't say that God is love and say also that we are imagined from God's own image, and then forget to say that we ourselves are lovable – that we ourselves are beautiful.

Humility isn't about relinquishing your dignity or the power and capacity you have to love. Instead, it's about embracing that dignity and love in their very fullest, and recognizing the dignity and love of others and embracing them in *their* very fullest. That's humility. That's honor, too.

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Eleven years ago, yesterday, I was hit by a car while bicycling, and I nearly lost my life. For the next eight days I was hospitalized in a trauma ward. Many of you have heard the story. At the time of my accident I had been a triathlete and a fire fighter. I didn't know *what or who* I'd be when I left that hospital. Lying in that trauma ward though, I did know that I was only one thing: humiliated. I'm still not sure where all of that shame came from – something rooted in my attachment to my own self-image, I suppose.

If part of honoring others is recognizing there is something they can teach you about life, then perhaps humility is a recognition that we still have something left to *learn* about life.

When I was lying in that hospital bed on the night I was hit, these wracking sobs began down in my stomach and worked their way up into stinging hot tears. My dad came into the room and awkwardly got into the hospital bed with me and held my broken, bloody, exhausted body. He rocked me and patted my back and told me over and over again that he loved me.

He could have stayed over by the bedside. He could have simply said *out loud*: “I love you.” But the most humble person I know, climbed *into a hospital bed* with a completely broken young man and honored him in the best and most appropriate way he knew how.

He told him he was loved.

“This is my beloved child with whom I am well pleased.” ...

You are God’s beloved children.

If you hear that voice (a voice proclaiming its love for you) then humble yourself and do not harden your hearts.