

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend Joshua H. Narcisse  
Sunday, August 31, 2025

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**Living for the Limelight**

**Luke 14:1, 7-11**

*On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.*

*When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place.*

*But when you are invited, 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. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

Y’all this text is the reason I have social anxiety.

This text is the reason I avoid the head chair at the table like the plague. Whether at work, out at a restaurant with friends, sharing a meal with one of you in your homes—I steer clear of the seat at the head of the table, and this text is why.

It was emphasized to me over and over again by my mother when I was a child, “Joshua, sit off to the side, don’t rush to the front of the line, head toward the back. Wait for them to invite you forward.”

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I was raised on this passage of scripture. It was lifted up as an ethic to follow, a way to live, a model for how to practice humility. That's what this text is tailored to teach us afterall.

Jesus is offering wisdom almost like he's writing alongside the author of Proverbs. Jesus is offering us straightforward, sound, thoughtful advice on how to live humbly.

And Beloved, that is crucial wisdom that comes to us as a holy nudge, it is a needed reminder in this present moment we find ourselves in.

In this moment where heart postures like compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, love, and indeed humility have few public champions left. This text offers us a good and faithful word for this moment—that the call to follow Christ is the call to live humbly.

And though I am tempted to say “Amen” and end the sermon there, especially since it's Labor Day weekend, I think there is another well of wisdom to draw from in this passage, one that might free us, free us from believing in all the ways we think we need to be, in order to be worthy of Jesus's invitation.

Beloved, let's go to a dinner party where Jesus will meet us.

Go ahead and grab the invitation off the refrigerator, “Dinner. Time: 6pm. Address: Luke's Gospel, 14th chapter.”

I know that's not much information to work with. But imagine with me for a moment that you've received a personal invitation to a dinner party with Jesus and it's time to get ready.

What will you wear? Not just the color, but how formally will you dress?

Are you going to put on your good shoes? Throw on some jewelry and accessories? Do you need a clutch or a purse? Are you going with a tote bag or crossbody?

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Or maybe you go for an understated look? Let her hair air dry instead of using a little product.

You can't show up empty handed, so what will you bring? Or better yet what do you have time to make? Nevermind that, time is starting get away from you so maybe you'll just stop at the store. But of course you don't want to insult the host.

What time do you plan to arrive? Do you arrive at 6pm on the dot? Or do you show up fashionably late for the Savior? And once you get there, where will you sit?

All of these questions, and maybe more, Beloved, I imagine these questions floated through the mind of the guests in this parable Jesus is describing for us today.

We know this parable is about humility, but what if we assumed the best intentions about the invited guests who are clamoring for the seat of honor?

What if we assumed the best intentions of these guests? Not that they are filled with hubris and arrogance, not that they are in competition with one another, like James and John, to see who is the greatest. Not that they think so highly of themselves that they cannot abide the thought of insignificance. What if we saw these guests, not as arrogant party goers, but as folks who have forgotten what they are living for.

As folks who have lost sight of who they are, lost confidence in whose they are, and have slipped into living for the limelight. Living for the light of external validation, popular positions, and perceived power.

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You can imagine what it was like getting ready for that dinner party. How many times he overthought which tunic to wear. And how many times she changed her mind on which pair of sandals complimented her head covering just right.

You can imagine. Imagine the hair crisis that nearly sent the evening into a tailspin before they got out the door. How much they stressed and fussed over the little details like what to wear and what to bring and when to show up because it all needed to be perfectly curated.

A perfectly put together life, a pretty presentation to all the other dinner guests that would be completed by the final act of getting the good seat at the table. Such good intentions, but completely lacking of authenticity.

Perhaps that's why the position of honor is so important. That position of honor would show how well they had it all together. The title in front of their names would mask the messiness as they were introduced to Jesus:

He's the CEO at First Jerusalem, and she's the lead researcher at St. Jeremiah. Their daughter's go to Miriam's School for Girls and they are faithful members at that gorgeous synagogue there on the hill.

Perfectly dressed, perfectly credentialed, perfectly positioned, perfectly put together. So perfect, that perhaps no one will notice how utterly insecure and afraid they are to be in a room with Jesus and the Pharisees, a room they don't even think they belong in.

What if we read the story that way Beloved? Not just as a reminder to live humbly, but as a mirror held up to each of us, that we live our lives more often than not trying to convince others that we are worthy and worthwhile, even though we haven't convinced ourselves of it.

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What we don't like to admit is that many of us have impostor syndrome. If you've never heard of imposter syndrome it's the experience of self-doubt, of questioning your accomplishments, your intellect, your abilities, and the fear that someone is going to expose you as a fraud.

It's the experience of believing that for some reason we're just not good enough, that we have to do something to earn our keep, earn our right to exist in the spaces we show up in. And perhaps Beloved, the actions of the guests in this passage is as much connected to their hubris as it is their insecurities.

I wonder how much of our lives are lived insecurely rather than faithfully? I wonder the kind of decisions we've made that we claimed were faithful decisions when really they were decisions made in an attempt to compensate for something we perceived we were lacking. I wonder how we have treated others out of the abundance of our own fears and anxieties and have inadvertently passed along our insecurities as examples of what it means to be trusted with authority.

Living insecurely means you'll always be living for the limelight, a place of honor, an important title, external validation to help you convince others of what you're still unconvinced about yourself. Living for the limelight means that you'll never believe that you are enough, even when it's God who says so.

You know why it's so hard to believe you are enough even when God says so? Because when your living is grounded in getting others to agree about your goodness, the claim of God upon your life becomes inconsequential. When you're living for the limelight, then all of your

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faithfulness becomes another thing to perform for the entertainment of others while neglecting the most important audience member of all, the one who invited you to the table in the first place.

That Beloved, what Jesus is drawing our attention to in this passage. That is where the guests miss the mark, that is where we all stumble. That instead of focusing on the fact that they are an invited guest—that the host has invited them, has called them, has chosen them to partake in this feast—these guests forget the fact that they are invited and spend all their energy trying to justify why they deserve the position of honor because of all the things they've done to try and make themselves worthy.

Nevermind the fact that you are wanted here. Nevermind the fact that you are needed here. Nevermind the fact that the banquet was planned with you in mind. But because you don't have the place of honor, or the title, or the affirmation of the right people, or the social capital, or the social media following, or the influence, or the financial resources and the status it comes with, because we don't have the markers of success, somehow that means we are less than. Unworthy. Frauds. And obviously, God must think so too.

Beloved, the mistake here, is living life as if any of those things play any role in who God is calling us to be. The failure here is living our lives for the limelight of a society that thinks existing isn't enough, that thinks "child of God" isn't the most transformative title we'll ever hold. Where we miss the mark is by hiding behind our position in the place of honor, by hiding behind the facades we have accumulated for ourselves, all while ignoring the reality that we are

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invited in the first place, that we are called God's own in the first place, that God breathed into us the breath of life and with it came all the validation we would ever need.

Beloved, what is it that has convinced you, that the you God adores isn't enough? What is it that you have committed yourself to prettying up, making more palatable and presentable because you believe folks can see right through you?

I know Jesus is talking about humility in this passage. But perhaps Jesus is offering us this wisdom today as well.

The parable ends with the familiar line, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." And I believe that's true. But lest we lose the plot and think that we are called to be humble so that we in and of ourselves are lauded and praised and admired. So that we are rewarded for our humility with prominence one day.

Perhaps what Jesus offered to those gathered with him at table, and with us this day, is the reminder that when we live humbly *and* when we live not for the limelight, but for God's delight, then God is exalted and we get a little closer to that kingdom we're building for each day.

In that place where the only light is the light of God. Where compassion and gentleness are not seen as weakness, but are the currency of the kingdom. Where there is no such thing as a zero sum game. Where I don't have to lose in order for you to win.

In that place where there is joy and fellowship and feasting, and where there is no place of honor, because everyone has been invited, and everyone has a place with their name on it. To the glory of God, Amen.