

## PARABLE ON HUMILITY

---

Homily by Rev. Benjamin Broadbent  
Preached September 2, 2007

Humility. Most of us would agree that it is a good thing. Good, but elusive.

Striving to be humble, we *humiliate* ourselves instead. We let go of power. Let go of boundaries. Let go of values. Letting go of these diminishes our life. Humility is not humiliation.

Striving to be humble, we can conceal a hidden agenda - *self-promotion*. We wear humility as a mask. We use humility as a means to gain its opposite. We lose our authenticity. Our integrity. Humility is not a mask nor a means. Humility is not back-door self-promotion.

Did the diners get what he was trying to tell them? Did they think that he was sharing common sense etiquette? Or that he was providing a pragmatic strategy to be included in the next edition of "How to win friends and influence people"? Did they get it? Do we get it?

As Luke tells it, what this rude dinner guest shared was a parable. Ugh, another parable, when what we could use is a straight talker with helpful insights, implementable advice, calculable strategies.

Instead, a parable. When someone invites you to a wedding banquet, don't sit at the head table, even if you think you belong there. Sit by the coat rack, near the kitchen.

The first wedding I ever performed: Broadmoor Hotel. Brought my wife, Brooke. Stayed for the reception. Seated close to the head table. Started chatting, introducing ourselves. Interrupted. So sorry, these seats are meant for someone else. Follow me. Seated near the back door. What a nice ceremony. Thank you, thank you very much. Interrupted. I'm embarrassed, but we weren't expecting you and don't have enough seats. We've set up a table in this adjacent room. Do you mind? Card table. Folding chairs. Disposable table settings. Now, I rarely attend receptions, although I'm almost always invited.

A parable. About what? About *the* Wedding Banquet, *the* meal of Grace and Celebration. The chapter preceding, verse 29: “People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

A parable about life as it truly is, not life as we usually find it. A parable about the essence of our common life, not the cheap version so often peddled as “the way it’s been, the way it is, the way it always will be.” A parable about the new way the world is to be organized. Our assumptions of have and have nots melt like ice. Our customs of heroizing the mighty lose clout. Our arrangements of power wilt in the face of a constant, insistent, yet below-the-radar alternative.

A parable about us. About how we seduce ourselves into valuing status and privilege and entitlement and security and certitude. But a parable even more about the One who claimed us before we could walk, the One who named us before we knew our own name. A parable about the One who loves the world that loves not in return, the One who offers an alternative arrangement even as entrenched structures endure as if eternal.

A parable about humble guests who know the joy of the banquet such that sitting at a card table represents infinite blessing. A parable about humble hosts who trust that blessing does not consist in being repaid a debt, but in giving freely.

A parable about the least, the lowest, and the lost. Behold, Jesus has favorites. When he imagines a banquet, they are there - the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, the unemployed, the immigrant, the transgendered, and the bereaved. The important people were all too busy to make it. Or they showed up, got a look at the crowd, and were too proud to stay.

Humility is awareness that life is an inestimable gift. Humility is willingness to give away what is of secondary importance. Humility is gathering at this table, in all your ruffraff-iness, eating, and knowing in that moment what it means to be full, to be filled, to be fulfilled. Amen.