



## St John Lutheran Church

1017 Montana  
Libby, MT 59923  
(406)293-4024

Luke 14:7-11

"Move Up to a Better Place"

**The comedian Garrison Keeler** imagines what it would be like if there was an airline called Lutheran Air: **"All fares are by freewill offering, and the plane will not land until the budget is met. Basses and tenors please sit in the rear of the aircraft. We're going to start lunch about noon, and then we'll have the hymn sing--hymnals in the seat pocket in front of you. Meals are potluck. Rows 1-6, bring rolls, 7-15 bring a salad, 16-21 a main dish, and 22-30 a dessert."**

**Potlucks and other** meals really do play an important role in the life of the church. **Sharing a meal** is literally sharing life...**sharing the** bounty that our Lord gives us....**sharing in** the fellowship of being who we are as Christians. **Meals together also** play an important role in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. **There are recorded... many happy** scenes in the Gospels of Jesus eating with His disciples... **family, friends,** and followers. **The wedding feast** at Cana where Our Lord turns water into wine... **the feeding** of the 5,000... **dinner at** the home of Mary and Martha... **the poignant** Last Supper where our Lord gives us His Body and Blood... **and then** the breaking of bread at Emmaus... **and joyous** breakfast with our risen Lord beside the Sea of Galilee. **And of course** there is the Great Banquet that our Lord now prepares for us in His Kingdom...**that eternal** feast where our Lord Himself will serve His Church...**His Bride....His most** cherished possession!

**Luke begins today's Gospel Reading** by setting the scene for us: **"One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched."** **This particular dinner** Jesus is attending, where He is not among friends... **but enemies.** **A few chapters** earlier Luke tells us, **"The Pharisees and the teachers of the law [were]... lying in wait for him, seeking to catch him in something he might say, so that they might accuse him."**

**Jesus has been** invited to dinner this evening at the house of a prominent Pharisee ...**not so** they can enjoy His company or have a friendly conversation ...**or to** listen to His teachings, which Jesus often presents at such meals. **No, the other** guests at this dinner reject His teachings and reject Him as the Messiah. **They consider Him,** at worst a charlatan...**one who** is deceiving the common people with his trickery. **And at best... according to** the Jews...**Jesus is** to them an unworthy upstart... **a country** carpenter turned rabbi... **who doesn't** deserve the following and attention He is getting.

**After all...if people are** going to listen to and follow someone on the topic of religion... **it shouldn't** be this nobody from Nazareth. **It should be** THEM... **the Pharisees.** **After all, aren't** they the most knowledgeable... **the most holy... the most** righteous in the sight of God. **That's what they** think, anyway.

**These Pharisees are** losing power and prestige to this "nobody" from Nazareth. **They need to** find some way to discredit Jesus among the common people. **So, they've invited** Him to dinner this evening... **hoping to** find some ammunition to use against Him... **"lying in wait for him, seeking to catch him in something he might say, so that they might accuse him."**

**Paul says in 1 Timothy, "God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."** **This is exactly** why our Lord Jesus accepted the invitation to this meal among His enemies... **that's**

**why** He is there that evening. **He wants all** men to be saved... **Jesus wants** to somehow get through to these enemies of His... **so that** they will come to a knowledge of the Truth...**who is** now standing before them in the flesh!

**But, how can** Jesus possibly get through to these men gathered for dinner that evening...these who already are so set against him and his teaching? **Luke says, "When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable."**

**Jesus often uses** parables... **engaging stories... to get** peoples' attention... **and get** them thinking. **This is a** common practice... **and even** a wise practice... **where a** teacher or preacher uses situations that his hearers can really relate to... **something from** their own experience. **Jesus is, of** course, the best teacher and preacher of all time... **and so** for His parable that evening He uses as His illustration something which is happening right there at the dinner. **Jesus uses a** situation that applies immediately to those who are before Him that evening!

**"When He noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, He told them this parable: 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast. . .'"** The deeper meaning of this parable starts to reveal itself when you realize that the Bible often pictures Heaven and eternal life like a great wedding feast... **with Christ** as the bridegroom... **and His Church... all who** trust in Him... **as the bride. As Revelation says, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"**

**So, this isn't** just a lesson in proper etiquette and social graces that Jesus is giving. **A parable is** an earthly story with a Heavenly meaning... **and this** story He tells about guests being seated at a wedding feast is really about heaven... **who gets in... or doesn't** get in.

**This deeper meaning** of the parable also comes out in the Greek word for **"invited,"** which literally means **"to call."** **Because that happens** to be the very word from which we get our word **"church,"** which literally means **"those who have been called out."**

**So, this isn't** just a lesson in proper etiquette and social graces. **This earthly story Jesus tells has a heavenly meaning.**

**"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests."**

**The first point** of the parable is... **Don't think you deserve it. Don't think you deserve to be seated at the heavenly banquet. For, none of us** is worthy to enter eternal life. **The irony is... the very thought** that you are qualified for Heaven... **that you** have somehow earned it and deserve it... **this actually** disqualifies you. **That puts you** into the category of those who exalt themselves. **"Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place,"** which is actually hell itself.

**"But when you are invited, take the lowest place."** The second point of the parable is: **Repent! That's what it means to "take the lowest place."**

**Acknowledge that you** are a sinner... **not at all** worthy to sit at the Heavenly banquet table.

**"The host will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.'"** The final point of the parable is the Good News... **Though you** don't deserve it... **God is** your friend...**who loves you** and who invites you to move up to a

better place. **"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."**

**The greatest example** is Jesus himself, as Paul says in Philippians, **"He made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death--even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name."**

**God invites you to "move up to a better place," God exalts you** to Heaven... **God invites** you and makes a place for you because His Son humbled Himself for you on the cross... **taking your** sins upon Himself and earning your forgiveness by His suffering, death and Resurrection. **God is the** host in the parable... **who on** account of His Son's sacrifice invites you to **"move up to a better place"** because your sins are forgiven! In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.... Amen.

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Rev. Eric M. Christiansen  
St. John Lutheran Church  
Libby, Montana