

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

C: 12th Sunday after Pentecost / Lectionary 22 / Proper 17
Luke 14:1, 7-14

28 August 2022
Salem, Bridgeport

“Humility is the Path, Not the Destination”

Humility is the path and not the destination.

“When Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them...

‘When you are invited by someone to a...banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor...

But ... go and sit down at the lowest place....’”

In this particular instance, Jesus gives a single reason:

so you won't be embarrassed if someone finds you sitting above your station.

But if you read the gospels, Jesus is always getting criticized for sitting below his station,

and his reason is certainly not because he wants to avoid being embarrassed!

Jesus has another reason for Jesus understands that humility is not the goal, but the strategy,

humility is not the prize, but the race, humility is not the destination, but the path.

Humility is the path and not the destination.

Jesus told parables, stories, to illustrate truth, so let me tell you a story today.

Tom had only been running a few minutes late when he left the house,

but there had been an accident on the highway and now he was definitely going to be late to the banquet.

It was the annual fund-raising event

for the non-profit organization spun off as a 501C-3 from his wealthy mainline church

of which he was a board member and to which he was also a major donor.

Well, there was nothing he could do about it. He'd be late. That was all.

When he finally arrived he stepped into the hall and looked around.

There was a head table at the very front

and then about a dozen tables for staff, board members, and donors,

and in the back of the room, where he had entered, there were four tables for clients.

As his eyes swept across each table, it quickly became clear – there was only 1 vacant seat in the entire room –

and it wasn't at the tables for board members and donors; it was at one of the tables for clients.

He could tell who they were by the way they looked.

Most, although not all of the board members and donors were white and well-dressed.

Most of the clients were black or Hispanic, and while they were dressed up, the clothing was not bespoke.

Damn. Already stressed by a busy day at work, getting out of the house late, and running into traffic,

the last thing he wanted to do was to sit with people he didn't know.

Sure, he could put on his “extroverted” business man persona, but he was at heart an introvert,

and right now he really didn't have the energy it took

to sit with strangers and make conversation with people with whom he had little in common.

This was not the evening he had expected, but there was nothing to be done about it.

He made his way to the empty seat, greeted the folks at the table, and sat down.

As it turned out, many of the clients at his table not only knew each other, but they seemed to be friends.

And yet they did not exclude him, but made him feel unexpectedly welcome.

Over the course of the evening he got to know a few of them.

There was Angelique on his left, a strikingly beautiful Haitian woman

who was maybe 10 years younger than his 52 years. She had a delightful accent and a musical laugh.

She'd been taking care of an elderly woman for the past 5 years,

but the woman had died and she was trying to line up another position

while she continued taking the classes she would need to teach in this country.

Her husband had been attending culinary school, but both hands had been injured in a fire

He had had 2 surgeries already and was facing more.

They needed help to get them through this difficult period,

and they were grateful to the organization for providing it.

On his right was Kendis, an African-American man who was maybe 39 or 40, self-employed as a mechanic, but who had broken his hip the year before and been unable to work for several months. He had made a full recovery and was even back to running, but he was still paying off the mountain of debt that accumulated when he had not been able to work at the same time he was incurring huge medical bills.

And on the other side of Kendis was Santiago, a Mexican-American house painter, who also pastored a Hispanic charismatic church in the neighborhood. Santiago was a great story teller, and not only had a great sense of humor, but an infectious laugh. Both Angelique and Kendis were members of his church, as were two others at the table.

Tom had definitely not wanted to sit at that table, but by the end of the evening he had had so much fun and enjoyed himself so much, it quite surprised him. And now, as he looked back on it, he could see God's hand at work, because that was when everything in his life had begun to change. Tom was a runner, and although he had not run in a race for several years, he had been thinking about running a half-marathon in the city's race that was coming up in a few months. It was hearing how Kendis was also thinking about trying to run in that race that moved Tom to ask Kendis if he would like to train together. Kendis had enthusiastically agreed, and the two had become running partners. And as they ran, they talked and shared much. Several years after their running partnership had begun, Kendis the mechanic had told Tom about an idea he had for a new kind of running machine that just might change the paradigm in the industry. He had the idea, and Tom had the connections, and the two running partners became business partners and their company was now up and running for the second year. It hadn't changed the industry paradigm yet, but they were sure it would soon.

Angelique was passionate about her poetry, but had never had anything published. That night at dinner, Tom had offered to introduce her to a friend of his who was in the publishing industry. While she had yet to publish her poetry, she'd published 2 children's books, the 2nd of which had received an award. And partly because of his friendship with Kendis and Angelique, and partly because he just enjoyed Santiago so much, Tom had started attending his church – not every week, but at least once a month or so.

In the intervening nine years between that dinner and the present moment, much had happened, Angelique's husband had been tragically killed when a drunk driver ran a red light and T-boned his car. Tom's wife had been diagnosed with cervical cancer, and died after over a year of failed treatments.

Now, 9 years after that banquet, Tom stood in front of the Hispanic charismatic church, his elegant black suit contrasting with his white skin and silver hair. On his left was his beautiful Haitian bride Angelique and on the right was his African American friend, partner, and best man Kendis. He smiled to himself as he thought back to how he had walked into the banquet that night, upset that he had had to sit, not with his friends, but with the people they served. Surprisingly he had had a wonderful evening. And now he was thanking God for that traffic jam that had made him late and landed him at that table.

Not in a million years would he have ever expected to be here in this place with these people. But "those clients", "those people" had become his people, his friends, and through them God had transformed his heart and filled it with joy.

He squeezed Angelique's hand as Pastor Santiago began to read the gospel, *"When Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them... 'When you are invited by someone to a...banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor... But ... go and sit down at the lowest place....'"*

And then Pastor Santiago continued. "Humility is not the destination", he said. "It's the path. It's the path of adventure, the path to treasure, the path to joy." "Amen", thought Tom. "Amen! Amen!"