

Many years ago, back when I operated a number of retail stores, if one of them wasn't profitable enough, we closed it and moved to a different location. If some of the merchandise wasn't selling well enough, we marked it down and discontinued that line, and if an employee wasn't doing their job well enough, we'd let them go and hire someone else to do that job. In sports coaches hold tryouts to select players for the team, the strongest & fastest, the best and most competitive athletes, **and the others who are not, are cut from the team roster.** That's just how it works in this world we get rid of clothes that are stained, wear out or don't fit. If something gets damaged or is defective it goes in the trash we keep what we want and find useful, and throw away the rest. **And since we know that sometimes that also happens with people,** we put a lot thought and effort into making a good impression, to show that we are competent, useful, worthy and needed, or we may try to associate with the right and influential people, as a way of establishing our own social status and position so we probably already have a pretty good idea about what's going on in this Luke passage today. During the time of Jesus, in the culture of ancient Palestine, honor and social status were huge and important considerations, and sharing a meal with someone was a very visible part **of establishing your social prominence and reputation by being perceived as connected to the right people.** In ancient times, to be invited to a banquet was a major social opportunity. Guests would recline around a low 'U' shaped table, and where you were situated in relation to the host clearly defined each person's level of prominence. As you can well imagine, there was considerable effort for status, in trying to be seen seated as near as possible to the host, and vying for social position by their place at the table. Jesus ridicules such gamesmanship for a more prominent seat,

vs. 7 9

When Jesus 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.

Whenever we see the phrase "wedding banquet" in the New Testament, it's a clue that it's really referring to the Kingdom of God, **and is revealing something about the implications of grace, & about living faithfully under the rule and reign of the Lord.** So Jesus was talking about much more than just seating arrangements or gracious behavior, or genteel etiquette and social status... **and obviously the point of his message was not how to get ahead in life by pretending to be humble.**

His parable is about how God views our efforts to gain status, and how God's grace effects the way we think and live.

vs. 11

For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

So in contrast to the Pharisees' emphasis on rules that govern outward behavior and jockeying to achieve impressive status and prominence, Jesus describes a vision in which the Spirit guides our thinking, which means to live our lives defined by God's grace & blessings, **as we walk in humble gratitude and obedience with Jesus Christ**. The world's system and values, all center on looking out for # 1, **and making sure that we get everything that is coming to us by establishing and safeguarding our position and status**. Jesus is describing other values & a whole different way of living, in which rather than a mad scramble for the stuff of this world, he offers us freedom **from** such power & value constructs **by reversing our sense of who is over and who is under**. He offers through humility, something far more prominent,

vs. 10 11

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.

The point is much deeper than just choosing where to sit socially. It's about living into the Kingdom of God right now, by not striving for this world's honor, riches and status, **so that God, the Divine Host, can invite us to a higher place**. Christian honor and position are not gained **by seizing prominence**, but are freely given as a gracious love gift from God... and in the next verses Jesus takes this message even further, i.e. because we're God's beloved ones, we can focus on gratitude which changes the way we practice hospitality and welcome, rather than trying to impress others by playing silly games. **Because we are secure in God's love, in God's promises and grace**, in contrast to the looking out for me first ways of this world... ... Jesus calls us to live a life that is redirected, and recommitted toward reflecting God's grace and promise especially toward the "not so noticed" around us.

vs. 13 14a

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you...

or as exemplified in the 2 Samuel passage. In the ancient world, whenever a new king came to power, it was normal and expected as a part of that process, to eliminate all his enemies and any potential rivals to his power, authority and legitimacy. So when David became Israel's king at the death of King Saul, he would be expected to get rid of any potential heirs by killing off any members of the deposed royal family. But when David came to power, seeing it as a gift & promise **from God**, he has no desire to follow with wisdom & ways of this world, but wants to pass along and share the blessings he's received.

2 Samuel 9:1,3

David asked, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" ... The king said, "Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?"

And when he heard about Jonathan's surviving son Mephibosheth, he ordered that he be found and brought before the king. As King Saul's grandson and next in line or succession to rule, Mephibosheth was a possible contender for the throne, and a potential threat against David's right to rule. Mephibosheth had been crippled for life as a baby, and with the rise of David replacing King Saul, he tried to disappear quietly into distant & isolated Lo Debar. Lo Debar, the name of the place where Mephibosheth was living, is also a clue that describes the quality of his life and circumstances. Lo Debar literally means, "no pasture" and was a barren and desolate region of worthless wilderness, a lonely and terrible wasteland that most people would avoid. No pasture – Lo Debar, it describes the tragedy and disaster Mephibosheth endured – for once he had been a beloved and healthy little prince, King's Saul's grandson with a bright & promising future. And now he is a crippled man in constant pain and distress, whose best hope and future is maybe he won't be noticed, or be deemed too insignificant for David to bother... **so now he makes his home, bare existence, surviving in Lo Debar. And at some point, haven't we all experienced life in Lo Debar...** those lonely and difficult discouraging times of sorrow, when we have felt misplaced, broken, defeated or unworthy, just wanting to hide out, and escape quietly and alone. Lo Debar is about tragic loss and soul crushing hopelessness, a sad and terrible place of dread, regret and resignation beaten into fear and anxiety over what tomorrow may yield, and a joyless desire just to be left alone in despair... **and it is often in that place of Lo Debar where God's grace shines into our fragility, our darkness and disappointment, calling us into the hope and renewed possibilities of God's promises of blessings and joyful abundance.** So from his Lo Debar, Mephibosheth is summonsed by the king, and he arrives fearfully, cowering in David's presence, for he cannot imagine anything other than more trouble. **David recognizes that God has blessed him abundantly & graciously**, and that Jonathan was his faithful friend who protected

him, **so David wants to provide for his son's future and needs.** Not only does David provide resources for Mephibosheth to live, but also reserves a place of honor for him at the royal table, which as a sign of welcome and acceptance, vs. 11 is an invitation for friendship, "like one of the king's sons". Mephibosheth came expecting the worst, but David asks,

vs. 3

"is there anyone to whom I can show the kindness of God?" "the kindness of God"

, is translated from a wonderful Hebrew word that is rich in theological meaning. The word is "hesed"... the defining characteristic of God, traditionally translated, "the steadfast loving kindness of God" which means mercy & compassion, an unswerving loyalty to promises and the blessing of a faithful and loving relationship that endures through any struggle or circumstance. It is the Hebrew word that best describes how God relates to us, with gracious love and mercy, righteousness and forbearance, **despite our sin, rebellion, ingratitude and selfishness. Jesus perfectly defined hesed through his own life and mission...** for in him, we see it in the father of the prodigal son, in the Good Samaritan's care for the stranger in need, in Jesus welcoming & eating with sinners & outcasts, or when he freely forgave the very ones nailing him to the cross. "hesed godly kindness" – embraces human suffering and distress with an active concern for the well being of others, **and may well be the best word in the whole of human language.** It is the undeserved gift of grace, compassion, goodness and mercy from the powerful given to the most undeserving and unworthy, the gift of kindness and hope far beyond ever being repaid... **as we see 'hesed' in David's gracious treatment of Mephibosheth.** Mephibosheth went from barely surviving in the barren wilderness of Lo Debar to receiving respect and a regular seat at the king's table. So too, b/c God so loves us, there is always a welcome & **hesed for us...** which is absolutely incredible, and thankfully **absolutely true.** God's hesed and grace never measure how far we have fallen, or how far we have strayed or how broken and wounded we are... but rather, we are truly welcome and invited to come and receive, for God's grace isn't picky, limited or selective and no one gets cut, rejected or is not welcomed inside. **The real point and application of this story, is that David, a man after God's own heart becomes an example, a model of how to respond to the grace and blessings of God.** Having received his kingship and the abundance of the Lord, David's desire was to pass along the kindness shown to him by asking,

"Is there anyone to whom I may show the loving kindness of God?"

Having received, now you and I are also called to give and to serve as a faithful reflection of the hesed of God. This world selects and rejects, and the world wants to determine who is worthy, and who is unworthy; who is acceptable or not; who is welcome and not welcome, included and excluded. **But that's not how our God operates.** The truth is, God has given us all good things **for no good reason**, and by that grace, invites us all **to do the same for others... so that we're not only receivers of grace but also called and equipped to be distributors of grace.**

The message for which the Church exists is to proclaim to the world that God will never in this world reject or abandon any of us. The promise is, that God's love for us will never change or grow dim, b/c it comes entirely as a gift, always an undeserved blessing. It is that absolute truth **of God's unrelenting love** that has astonishing power to transform, and make new everything about our ways, affections and living... **as God intervenes and grace intersects with our lives...** as described in

Ephesians 2:4~10

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved ... so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ... it is the gift of God ... For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.