

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 14:1, 7-14

¹ *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.*

⁷ *When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸ “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, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

¹² *He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

Don and I do not watch much television since we moved to Hagerstown—except for NASCAR races, football, Diners, Drive-ins and Dives on Friday night, and sometimes shows on the History Channel. But when we did watch a lot of television, one of the shows that we never missed was, “The Big-Bang Theory.” Even after the show was discontinued, we watched the reruns over and over. Occasionally now, after a race or a game, if we want to continue watching TV, we find the reruns and watch them.

As I began my study for this sermon, an episode of “Big-Bang,” that we recently watched again, came to mind. Sheldon, an obnoxious, socially-challenged, super intelligent professor was living with Amy, his awkward and very intelligent girlfriend in a friend’s apartment while Amy’s apartment needed some repairs. Their living together was, for Sheldon, an experiment to see if he and Amy were compatible.

Amy mentioned to Sheldon one day that she thought it would be nice if they invited friends over. Sheldon felt it was a foolish idea and shot it down. Then on another day, Amy comes home from somewhere and is surprised to find food on their table and the table was set for more than just the two of them.

Amy asked what was going on and Sheldon explained that he had invited some people over for a brunch. Sheldon said, “You expressed an interest in having people over and I feel I dismissed it too quickly. So, I took matters into my own hands and arranged a brunch.” Amy was pleased and she asked, “Who’s coming?” Sheldon replied, “Stuart.” For those who do not know, Stuart was a friend who owned a comic bookstore, who was not super-intelligent, was super socially awkward and had a very, very low self- esteem.

Also invited was Bert, a geologist, and a neighbor, Mrs. Petrescu, who was a woman learning English by watching television, so many of her comments during their conversations involved commercial verbiage. Sheldon explained to Amy that he chose these people, insinuating that they were not high on the list of those he would consider worthwhile guests because this brunch was merely an experiment.

The guests arrived and sat down to eat. Stuart wondered if other guests were coming because the other two guests did not offer meaningful conversation. Sheldon explained that no one else was coming and somehow lets it leak that this brunch was a practice run. Stuart felt insulted and accused Amy and Sheldon of being disingenuous and using them as guinea pigs—people not really worthy of being dinner guests in their apartment.

Today's lectionary reading begins by setting the stage for what is to come later when we read verses 7-14. We read that Jesus was invited to a dinner party on the Sabbath at the house of a leader of the Pharisees. There were other guests who were likely other Pharisees and leaders of the temple. Luke makes a point to tell us that they all were watching him closely, signaling to us that their motivation for inviting Jesus was disingenuous. Because they felt he was a threat to their prestige among the Jews and because he was gaining popularity among the Jews, they wanted to get rid of him.

So, this was a trap to capture him in saying or doing something wrong. The fact that the meal was on the Sabbath is likely another indication that this was a trap. The law stated clearly that no one was permitted to do any kind of work on the Sabbath. Without going into the details of the law, let it suffice to say, that even the smallest of efforts were considered work and should not be attempted on the Sabbath. This included cooking a meal. Food for meals was prepared for the Sabbath the day before and had to be stored in a manner that kept them from needing to be cooked or even reheated on the Sabbath. The Pharisees apparently believed that the Sabbath with all of the restrictive laws associated with it was the perfect day for a set-up to catch Jesus doing something considered a breaking of the law so they could arrest him.

After Luke gives us the setting, we find out through the verses that were not a part of today's lectionary text, that there was a man with an illness—dropsy—at the dinner party too. There's a good chance that the Pharisees invited the man with the ailment to the dinner as a part of their set-up to see what Jesus would do. We can assume this because the Greek word interpreted for "watching" means "interested and sinister espionage."

The Pharisees likely heard about Jesus healing others on the Sabbath, and wanted to capture him doing it first-hand. The Gospels record seven stories in which Jesus healed people on the Sabbath—two of those stories are recorded in Luke's Gospel prior to this dinner party.

We read in verses 2-6: "Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the experts in the law and Pharisees, 'Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath or not?'" But they were silent. So, Jesus took him and healed him and sent him away. Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?" And they could not reply to this.

Jesus foiled their trap. His questions to them struck them deep in their hearts, and if not in their hearts, it challenged their common sense. He in essence said to them: "Let's be real, here. I can see right through your plan to trap me. It's ridiculous! You know you wouldn't allow your child or ox to drown just because it was the Sabbath. Why should this man continue to suffer when right before him is the opportunity to be healed?" They knew he was right, so they could not reply.

Jesus wasn't finished with his attempts to teach a personal lesson to those gathered who thought quite highly of themselves, through the telling of a parable. The lesson he wanted them to learn was on the value of humility. The parable setting was a wedding banquet. He invited all to think about how and why they choose where they would sit when they gather for the meal at a special occasion. He reminded them that they all knew there would be special seating for distinguished people at the dinner, so someone not fitting that description should not seat

themselves at the distinguished guests' tables. If they did, they would likely find themselves embarrassed when the host would come and ask them to move to a different place.

On the other hand, if a person deliberately sat at a place assigned to less distinguished people and then was invited to move to the distinguished peoples' table, it would be his humility that gained him honor among others. We read in verse 11 that Jesus said, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Humility is a key characteristic of those who follow Christ. Humility is nurtured in us when we recognize that we do not know or understand everything there is to know and understand. We do not assume the position of being "Mr. or Mrs. Know It All." William Barclay writes, "However much we know, we still know very little compared with the sum total of knowledge. However much we have achieved, we still have achieved very little in the end. However important we may believe ourselves to be, when death removes us or when we retire from our position, life and work will go on just the same."

We recognize humility in us when we compare ourselves to others. We all do it; but not always in a healthy way. When I talk about comparing ourselves to others, I don't mean it as gathering ammunition to devalue our self-worth. But as healthy comparison, if we are not puffing-up ourselves with unrealistic pride, we can see honestly that there are others who know more about some things or others who can do some things better than we can; and humbly we acknowledge there are opportunities of growth available for us. It encourages us to learn more and try new things.

Humility is nurtured as we walk side-by-side with Jesus—the ultimate example of living the good life. Looking to him we recognize our shortcomings, our unworthiness in comparison to his glory and perfection. Comparing ourselves to him, surely, our haughty pride will die, and our conceit will wither.

Following the telling of this parable, Jesus turns to the man who invited him to the dinner party and poignantly confronts him on his motivation for hosting the dinner party, inviting particular guests and him. As I mentioned early, the Pharisee's motivation was disingenuous, and Jesus knew this. The man's efforts were not intended as a kindness or to be generous. All the Scribes and Pharisees at that event were incriminated by Jesus' question.

Not only was their motivation to trap Jesus into doing something wrong, but it was intended to feed their egos, to make them feel superior to others, thereby sending the message to others that they were better than most people and anyone calling their superiority into question would be dealt with in order to "put them in their place." They, in fact, by taking advantage of the authority given to them by the Jews created themselves to be self-righteous, even over God's authority.

Jesus was calling them before the accountability of God. It is not God's way that anyone should think of themselves more highly than another; nor should anyone be made to feel like a lesser being than another. Jesus call's us to "be real" with ourselves and with others, recognizing that we and all people were created by God, and we are His. This is who we are at the heart of our being. Being real is grounded within us as we find ourselves in our bonded relationship with God and shaped by our obedience to God's ways.

Being real matures as we approach God always with humbleness. Approaching God, consciously or unconsciously, as one who thinks they are the authority of all the answers to life's questions or as one who demands from God their own way or one who in essence thinks he/she can trap God for one's benefit, just as the pharisees thought they could trap Jesus, is a sign of a disingenuous Christian.

August 28, 2022 - Being Real

Like what Jesus did to the Scribes and Pharisees at this dinner party, Jesus calls out those proclaiming Christ as their Savior today with the same disingenuous attitudes and behaviors. Jesus tells us that it is totally unacceptable! Be real, he says, allowing this realness to find its way in and through expression in our lives as we walk humbly with Jesus.

Going back to my story about the episode from the “Big-Bang Theory” that I mentioned at the beginning of this message: as Stuart confronted Sheldon about how he was feeling, Sheldon, often emotionally challenged, finds himself being humbled as he backsteps and in doing so discovers how much he does appreciate Stuart as a friend. The episode ends with Sheldon and Stuart finding themselves on the same playing field, equally lifting each other up as commendable and desirable friends.

Be real! Walk, humbly with Jesus; and in doing so, you will be your true self, just as God created you to be. And you will be a blessing to others as you bring honor to God. Amen.