

## Finding Your Place

Luke 14:1-14

The beginning of the school year is all about finding your place. Students moved into dorm rooms or apartments, finding a place for their stuff. They tried to choose those apartments or dorms based on where their classes were, where their friends live, how easy it was to get to CyRide or walk to where they needed to go.

When classes begin, they have to find their place. Do you sit up front, so you can see and hear the best? Or do you sit in the back, so you can get out as quickly as possible? Or do you make sure you sit by your friends, wherever they're sitting? Or do you have to make sure you find a spot by an outlet to plug your laptop in?

Most movies about high school begin with a map of the cafeteria, telling which group sits where. Jocks over here, nerds over there, the popular girls in the middle, the loners off in the back. Try and sit in the wrong place, and you risk getting mocked, food dumped over you, or beaten up. You have to know where to sit when you eat.

It doesn't get any easier as you grow up. Who will you sit with when you eat in Seasons or at the MU or at another dining hall on campus? Who do you invite to business lunches? Do you have lunch meetings with your boss, or does the whole office go out to lunch without you? How does your family sit at gatherings? Who sits with whom at the wedding reception?

In Jesus' day, knowing your place was important in society. You needed to know where you fit in the hierarchy, where you belonged. You didn't want to overreach, for fear of being knocked down a peg or two. At the same time, you didn't want to under value

yourself, and be left behind. You needed to know your place.

This was especially true when you were eating with others. The rules of table fellowship were strict. You would only eat with those on the same level as you. You would only eat with those who were ceremonially clean, with those who were as righteous as you were. Eating with someone meant that they were as close as family, and that came with a lot of obligations, so you were careful who you invited to a meal. You have to know who will eat with you. Even within that group, though, there were levels. Among your peers, you wanted to be seen as the most important. You wanted to be seated closest to the host. You wanted those who were closest to you to see that you were better than they were, that you were more respected, more well liked, more in favor than they were. It was a chance to show off, to be seen. Where you sat showed your position in society.

In the Roman world, Caesar was often known as a benefactor. It didn't just mean that he did good things. It also meant that he did good to those who were beneath him, which was everyone. But he did that good in such a way that the social distance remained.

Jesus took the opposite approach. He lowered himself. "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." Paul encouraged the Philippians to follow the example of Jesus in being slaves of Christ.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of

others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Or, as Martin Luther put it, “A Christian is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none, and a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all.” It’s not that we simply think less of ourselves, but, more importantly, we think about ourselves less.

CS Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, writes about how humility helps us find ourselves in ways that exalting ourselves never could. “The more we get what we call “ourselves” out of the way and let [Christ] take us over, the more truly ourselves we become. ... The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. ... Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.”

George Washington Carver is one of Iowa State’s most famous graduates, but he didn’t set out to do that. Instead, he pursued his degrees, and then went south to teach at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. A gifted teacher, Carver was also a devoted researcher, experimenting with seed, soil, and feed grain. He taught local farmers how to rotate crops, to plant peanuts to enrich the soil, and discovered over three hundred uses for the peanut plant. Carver turned down offers for huge salaries by working for major industries because he wanted to stay at Tuskegee and help his people. He knew his place wasn’t in the highest places where he could benefit himself. He knew his

place was serving to lift up those who needed his help.

Many of Jesus’ parables feature invitations to celebrations or feasts. He was a frequent dinner guest. He blessed the wedding at Cana by his presence and first miracle, when he turned water into wine. He dined with Mary and Martha, as well as the Emmaus disciples. Jesus even invited himself to dinner at the home of Zacchaeus the tax collector! No wonder his opponents grumbled about Jesus: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2, NIV). Sharing a meal implied full acceptance. And Jesus enjoyed meals with everyone, regardless of social status or religious background.

Jesus is the ultimate host. On the night of his betrayal, he told his disciples, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). Yes, Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. At the Lord’s Table, he even welcomes sinners like us. For in the Lord’s Supper, he is at once both meal and host, welcoming us to his Table to receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. “Take and eat,” Jesus says. “Take and drink.”

Jesus assumes the place of honor and power “at the right hand” on the throne. Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading and interceding for us. From there he invites us to come forward, to be with him, to take a place with him at a feast that will never end. What a wonderful invitation. What a wonderful gift.

Pastor David Beagley  
Memorial Lutheran Church and Student Center,  
Ames, Iowa  
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