

Mind your manners! Chew with your mouth shut. No elbows on the table. Use your napkin not your sleeve. Ask to have something passed to you don't reach across everybody to get it. And when you want to leave the table always say excuse me. These are the basic rules of table manners we all learn growing up, at least we should.

Today it seems that maybe we're too busy for manners. Are we so self centered to think that maybe our behavior affects other people? We have to remember that manners are something that's learned not something we're born with. In the same way humility is something learned not something we're born with. Manners and humility easily go out the window at family supper time. But does that seep into our spiritual lives? Maybe a humble Christian is a bad thing.

Jesus accepted a dinner invitation to a Pharisee's house. As he watches the people sitting down he goes into a story. It sounds like a lesson on manners. But Jesus is going deeper than that. He's talking about more than table manners and etiquette. In the gospel for today Jesus is telling us that...

**A humble Christian is a good thing  
God honors the truly humble  
Our reward comes at the resurrection**

If you've seen the start of a horse race you've seen the jockeying for position. Some horses like to ride near the inside while others like the outside. Some like to take the lead quickly and run with no one in front. Others are okay hanging in the back and then racing to the front near the end of the race. Jesus was witnessing something similar. The guests arrived and jockeyed for the best seats. Seats nearest the host or the special guest were prized.

All this commotion gave Jesus the opportunity to tell a story and put this scene into a spiritual context to teach them a lesson. **"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor..."** That's exactly what they were doing. Now Jesus was telling them not to. **"...for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited."** You don't know who the host invited. As distinguished as **you** think **you** are and as hard as it might be to believe that someone better than you might be out there the best seats could be reserved for someone else. How humiliating if you had to move.

Humility doesn't come naturally. Watch kids when the teacher tells them to line up. Everybody wants to be first. They'll push, shove, and yell to get there. Even the disappointed looks of the kids at the back tell you they wanted to be first they just weren't quick enough this time. Adults, you ever attend a weekly meeting at the office where someone just dominated the conversation? Every question asked they answered. Every time comments were asked for they had something to say. Has that ever been you? What happened to being humble and respecting other people who might have an answer or comment to make?

And there have been times when you reversed the idea hoping to get ahead just as much. Rather than jump to the front I'll volunteer for the back. When all the other students get yelled at for pushing the teacher might make me the leader. Rather than dominating a conversation I'll let others have a say. Then the boss will ask me specifically for a comment. We want the honor in front of everyone. **"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."** Jesus reverses it right back. You can't outsmart Jesus to get something the wrong way. This is about true humility.

But where does humility come from? Kids aren't born using their napkins they must be taught. Adults don't naturally say excuse me when bumping into someone else they're taught. A Christian isn't naturally humble they have to be taught. God's Word teaches us that deep down our inability to be humble is really because of our sinfulness. We hate God and want to boast in ourselves. That's not humility but pride. The Word of God combats pride. James said, **"Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"** Humility makes people look poor and weak. But God lifts us up in his Son Jesus. Christ died for all our line jumping, spotlight hogging, and prideful behavior. We're forgiven in Jesus for our lack of humility.

So when you offer your seat to someone on the bus, when you take the cart standing in the parking lot, when you pick up the trash left by someone else, when you hold a door or pull out a chair for someone, when you do all these things and so many more you're showing your humility. Not for glory, attention, or fame. It comes from another place. It comes from the knowledge that even if you were the last one into heaven, you'd still be in heaven. Being there is better than being anywhere else. And Christ promises you will be there. Because of that promise your Christian humility shines. You're humble because Christ Jesus saved you. It's the great flip of God's kingdom: God honors those who are humble.

When the preschool kids are good during the day they get a sticker. But rather than wait till you notice or ask how good they were, they'll march right up to you and show you how good they were. See the sticker. Not much humility in that. And there's some shame in not getting one. If everyone is showing off their sticker but they're not it's humiliating. You can see it on their faces. You and I are waiting for something better than a sticker. But God honors the truly humble and not always during this life. It will happen, but our reward is coming at the resurrection yet to come.

Have you ever given a gift to someone for a birthday or anniversary thinking to yourself I wonder what they'll get me? We sometimes give to get. Jesus finishes his story and then addresses his host personally. Did the host really humbly invite all these people to be nice? It was his friends, relatives, and rich neighbors that were there. I think he was expecting to be paid back someday.

It may seem odd to invite total strangers to our house even if they do fit Jesus' criteria of **"the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind."** Of course this lack of humility and seeking immediate payback for our actions is in many areas of life. We like the recognition that comes with giving a special or large donation to a charity. Sometimes we like people to know just how generous it was to borrow money to a family member, and that we'll be collecting on that favor someday. We like to be seen doing something nice so we get the reward we feel we're owed. These all can be sinful actions if we're looking for reward here and now.

Reward by its nature is not paid back. Reward is something given without obligation. Kindness and humility practiced with an eye on the reward is hardly true kindness or humility. It lacks love when we seek to gain a reward. Yet Jesus promises us a reward. Not now, but later. Not based on merit, but based on grace. Not something you can buy or win, but something already won for you through Christ's blood. **"Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."** God loved you when you were totally unlovable in his eyes. In his love you find empowerment to practice humble Christian love.

Because your reward at the resurrection is so great you can live and give today without thinking about reward. Let it motivate you to give of everything you have. Don't give hoping to get. Don't invite expecting a return invitation. Open doors, welcome those who can't pay back, serve with no expectations. Give away what was freely given to you in Christ. All this will be pleasing in God's eyes. And God is preparing your reward, a heavenly crown of perfection given to you on the Last Day.

We must continue to teach our children manners and humility. They won't learn it otherwise. Being a humble Christian is a good thing. What's important is knowing where it comes from. It never comes from us but always from our Savior. True humility based in the Savior God will honor. And we live knowing we have a reward. Not based on what we accomplish, but rather what our Savior has accomplished through us. In Christ we are guaranteed a reward at the resurrection.