

## *Humble Pie*

**Hebrews 13:1-3 CEB** Keep loving each other like family. <sup>2</sup> Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup> Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place.

**Luke 14: 1, 7-11** One Sabbath, when Jesus went to share a meal in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees, they were watching him closely. <sup>7</sup> When Jesus noticed how the guests sought out the best seats at the table, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup> "When someone invites you to a wedding celebration, don't take your seat in the place of honor. Someone more highly regarded than you could have been invited by your host. <sup>9</sup> The host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give your seat to this other person.' Embarrassed, you will take your seat in the least important place. <sup>10</sup> Instead, when you receive an invitation, go and sit in the least important place. When your host approaches you, he will say, 'Friend, move up here to a better seat.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. <sup>11</sup> All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up."

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Food is a big deal. There's an old saying, "You are what you eat." That's a way of saying that you tend to be healthy if you eat healthy - and if you eat unhealthy food, your health will suffer. But who you are is shown by what you eat. Southern Living magazine devotes a lot of space to southern cooking. If you like grits, there's a strong likelihood that you didn't grow up in Wisconsin. Your taste in barbeque is a strong indicator of which part of the South is your home. Some favorite foods indicate your economic status. Other favorites can indicate your ethnic heritage. Some foods are linked to activities: popcorn to movies, hot dogs to baseball. The concession stand at Cushwa Stadium doesn't sell quiche, spinach salad, or soufflé.

Significant events call for significant meals. It's how we celebrate weddings, anniversaries, Thanksgiving, and the Fourth of July. We have an annual Chili Cook-off to raise money for food pantries - and politicians have expensive dinners to raise money for election campaigns. Business deals are proposed and celebrated with fine food and good wine. Food is important. It's more than nutrition. It's fellowship. It's a social lubricant. It's identity, love, and compassion. In joy and sorrow, we gather and eat.

Here's a Bible trivia question for you, although the answer isn't trivial in any way. What is the only miracle found in all four gospels? . . . . Feeding the multitude! Eating is important. In the early years of the church, Christians met in homes, and a central part of their worship together was eating. Around and during that meal they prayed and sang, and discussed scripture, and shared stories of Jesus, and loved the Lord and one another. Never underestimate the value of a covered dish lunch in strengthening the body of Christ.

Today's text from the letter to the Hebrews says that we shouldn't neglect to open up our homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. The writer is referring to the story in Genesis chapter eighteen in which Abraham sees three strangers approaching his camp. He asks them to stop and eat and has fine food prepared for them. Later Abraham learns that these are angels.

Today's text from Luke is similar in an interesting way. Without knowing it, the Pharisees invite God, in Christ, to share a meal with them. While Abraham offered pure hospitality, the Pharisees' invitation to Jesus had a hidden agenda. The text says that they were watching Jesus closely. Pharisees were very religious. They paid close attention to all of the laws and regulations and they were especially concerned with religious purity. Jesus was an

unknown. He hadn't been raised in a family of Pharisees, yet he taught as if he knew God's will. And so, they were watching him closely - and inviting him to dinner was a good way to take a closer look.

Jesus exceeds their expectations. He isn't a passive guest. They may have planned to ask him questions, but Jesus is proactive. He seizes the agenda and commanders the role of host. First he asks them if the Law allows healing on the Sabbath? Or, is that prohibited work? They're experts on the Law, but they don't answer before he picks out a man at the table who has a swollen belly caused by excess fluid – and he heals him. Before they can protest that he's violated the Sabbath rules by working, Jesus turns to the other people at the table and asks them, "If your child or your ox fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, you'd pull them out right away, wouldn't you? No one answered him and Jesus continued to have the floor.

He'd noticed that when everybody arrived, they jockeyed for position at the table. Just like a political dinner today, the most important people sit at the head table. Jesus says, don't rush to grab the seats of honor, because you might get bumped by someone more important. It sounds like a lesson in table etiquette, and it parallels the point in Proverbs 25:6-7 CEB "Don't exalt yourself in the presence of the king, or stand in the place of important people, <sup>7</sup> because it is better that he say to you, 'Come up here,' than to be demoted before a ruler." If we understand both the proverb, and Jesus' comments at this meal, as political correctness and cunning maneuvers, then we are working hard to miss the point. Luke tells us that the comments Jesus makes about seating arrangements are a parable. Parables are always stories that are about bigger issues than a simple story. This isn't about how to maneuver to get the best position short of embarrassment. It's about humility.

Proverbs also tells us (Proverbs 16:5 CEB) "The LORD detests all who are arrogant" and (Proverbs 16:18-19 CEB) "Pride comes before disaster, and arrogance before a fall. <sup>19</sup> Better to be humble with the needy than to divide plunder with the proud." O, no! Jesus is talking again about the sin of pride and the virtue of humility. We really don't want to talk about humility. I looked in the index of the Book of Confessions for a listing of passages about humility. Nothing. No statement of faith holding up humility as a core pillar of the faith. I went looking in the index of the hymnal for hymns to sing that would tie in with the theme of the sermon. There was no listing for humility in the index. I began to search through other hymnals. Surely somewhere there would be some hymn that would lift up the virtue of humility. Finally, in a Methodist hymnal from the sixties, the index had a category titled "humility." But as I looked at the hymns, they were all about our humility before God. I mean, that's good. It's important. Micah said that walking humbly with God is the essence of what God wants us to do.

But Jesus isn't teaching about how we are to be humble in our relationship with God. Jesus is very pointedly teaching about humility in our relationships with each other. These days, I'm afraid that humility isn't held in high regard. It's not something that's sought after. You can be forced into it when you make a mistake and circumstances force you to admit it. We call that "having to eat crow" or "eating humble pie." These aren't tasty dishes. Oddly enough, every once in a while we come across someone who is truly humble. They really stand out in our culture. People admire folks like Mother Theresa. People admire humility in others, but seldom cultivate it in themselves.

We forget that the message of Jesus can call us to be radically different. As those who follow in Jesus' footsteps, Paul urges us in the second chapter of the letter to the Philippians to be radically different. "Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves." <sup>4</sup> Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for

what is better for others. <sup>5</sup> Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. <sup>7</sup> But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. When he found himself in the form of a human, <sup>8</sup> he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:3-8 CEB)

Jesus taught humility in a meal setting and in a meal setting we can follow in his footsteps. CCM, a food pantry that we support with money, food, and volunteers, serves meals to the poor and homeless two or three nights a week. When we sponsor one of those meals, there are some important things to keep in mind. When you prepare the food, it is Christ's hands mixing the ingredients. When you bring the food, it is Christ's feet bearing the load. When you serve the food, it is Christ's loving smile on your face. And the person you hand the food to is a child of God. May you not eat humble pie, but serve pie with humility! All four gospels tell us about Jesus feeding the multitude. As you feed the multitude, let them see Christ in you. It will be the most holy and important thing you do that day.

Feeding and eating is so important that the expression heavenly banquet is a metaphor for the kingdom of God. It expresses the bounty of creation and the overflowing generosity of God's grace. May those who come to eat at CCM truly have a meal of grace, a heavenly banquet, and as a result, know that the kingdom of God is very near. Amen.

Sisters and Brothers,  
Walk humbly with God, yes.  
And following the example of our Lord,  
Let us empty ourselves  
so that we may humbly serve those in need.