

“Friend, move up higher,” Luke 14:7-11  
Tom Johnson, August 29, 2010

Jesus and others were invited to eat dinner at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. And as they sat down for supper, Jesus began to observe how each person chose for themselves places of honor.

For us the places of honor might be at the head of the table, a nice window seat, sitting next to an important person, or the closest seat to the serving table. Jesus saw how each guest was trying to strategically and selfishly sit down for a meal.

I wonder what Jesus would observe of our behavior. I’m thinking about being on one of the many interstate highways in northern Illinois where construction has been going on for months and how three lanes merge to two lanes and two lanes merge to one lane.

What would Jesus say about those drivers who refuse to let cars merge in front of them so that they won’t lose 4.2 seconds of time on their journey? What would Jesus think about those drivers that refuse to merge right away and whiz on by dozens of cars and then demand entrance to the front of the line?

One driver cuts in and the other feels cheated. But we all have the same thing on our mind—the place of honor—being at the front of the line. We often have ourselves and our own needs and wants as our top priority.

Whether it is the place of honor at the first century dinner table or being the first to see those orange cones in our rear view mirror, we often find ourselves completely preoccupied and lost in ourselves.

For Jesus, where you sit at the table and whether you get through a construction zone earlier is a small window into the human soul. It is a small window but what we see through that little window is a huge problem.

There is something deeply wrong with us as a human race—there is a sickness that plagues us all—and that troubling reality that we all experience is pride. Pride is the belief that I belong at the head of the table—it’s my place in line, not yours—what happens to me is of greater consequence than you.

And for Jesus pride is not something that we possess and or merely motivates what we do. Pride is something more sinister. Pride is to live our lives trapped—trapped in a world where the self is the center of the universe. It is a false world.

It’s why Jesus suggests sitting at the lower places and allowing others to merge in front of you. Not everyone can be as important as we think we are. There are 6.5 Billion people in this world and we cannot always be first.

Jesus wants to save us from the shocking, painful and startling realization that we may not be as important as we think we are. He wants to ease us into a sober, self-assessment. He wants us to see that the world will not and cannot revolve around us. He calls us to humility.

And humility is not as painful and unattractive as it may first seem. Jesus calls us out of a world where we serve ourselves. He calls us into a world where we serve others and the great Other serves us.

Jesus said, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.”** It is first and foremost God’s job to serve us. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

He is primarily the one in our story who says, **“Friend, move up higher.”** Be lifted up. He serves us by giving us a greater vision of what this world should be like. He lifts us up to a God-centered universe.

He serves us by forgiving us when we fail. He lifts us up to restored relationships. He serves us by giving us life in a world plagued by sorrow and death. He lifts us up to eternal life. Once we see how well we are served by God, the grace and love we enjoy becomes contagious.

There is a new commercial my children told me I had to see. It is about a little boy’s first day in a new school. The first thing we see is his bag pack is unzipped and things about to fall out. But another older boy sees it and zips it up.

The next thing we see is the little boy heading up the stairs. The same older boy gently takes him a side for a moment just before a stampede of kids race down those same stairs.

The next thing we see is the little boy eating an Oreo cookie trying to find a way of dipping in his milk but the spout is too small. The same older boy shows him how to open it wide enough to immerse it in milk. He begins to catch on that someone is watching over him.

The last thing we see is the little boy seeing an even younger boy trying to dip his cookie in milk. And the little boy who was helped so many times is now happy to help another boy get through the difficulties of his day.

My family loves this commercial. Because last week was the first day of school for us and shows the contagious kindness of one human being to another. It communicates the spirit of humility that Jesus is talking about.

Like the little boy in the commercial, our first calling is to see how much God has served us. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, He says to us, “Friend, move up higher.” He makes all things new. God gives his Son to die and rise again so that we have peace and eternal life—to move us higher and closer to him—for eternity.

We begin to catch on that Someone is watching over us—and this Someone is God. And it is out of that full reservoir of grace, peace and love that we can begin to serve on another with humility and joy and speak good news to a world that desperately needs it, “In Christ be lifted up... friend, move up higher!”