

Humbleness, another Name for Love

What did they do wrong? They were just sitting there, invited guests at the table of their friend, one of the leaders of the Pharisees. They accepted their invitation as always, they chose their own seats as always, and they shared a meal together as always. It was just another Sabbath meal. But one of the guests criticized their behaviour. Imagine how embarrassing that must have been!

And what about the host? He invited his friends, relatives and other leaders for Sabbath dinner – the most important meal of the week. He was doing his best for all his guests including Jesus, but all he got from Jesus was criticism, not praise. Wasn't Jesus going too far?

When everything looked normal to them, they were challenged by Jesus. Likewise, when we think everything is okay, maybe we are challenged by him too.

When the guests tried to take the best seats, Jesus saw their behaviour as their way of life: being competitive to get a better position, to get closer to the right people, to gain more power. It is normal to be competitive.

We all have learned to be competitive in classes, in sports, in games, in business – a competitive spirit is seen as a real asset. But when it becomes our only way of life, we can get easily tired and stressed, because when life is a competition, there are always more losers than winners.

There were probably more losers than winners to get the best seats at the Sabbath dinner. Those who could not get good seats might have been jealous, and those who were lucky enough and fast enough to get the best seats might have flaunted their nearness to the host. It is not easy to find love and trust in their relationship, because their way of life is based on fear: fear of losing a good position or failing to gain a better one, always fighting to maintain or better their status.

Those who persecuted Jesus had a similar fear that his teaching and ministry would pull down their privileges, and strip them of their power. Most of the guests at the dinner were leaders in society, and the Pharisee who invited them, whether he intended it or not, reinforced his privilege by inviting his friends, family, and rich neighbours without taking a risk.

Everyone at the dinner was challenged by the one who was not afraid to take a risk. He was the one who showed a different table based on love; it's not about *where* you sit, it's about *who* you sit with.

Of course, most people eat with their families and their friends, not with strangers. I think Jesus also never ate with strangers - there were no strangers in his eyes; everybody could be a friend to him. I am so glad that Jesus actually had a meal together with Pharisees. He was being a friend of both sides: people who were publicly known as sinners, and people who believed themselves sinless. Jesus challenged his friends who thought they were not like sinners to expand their boundaries by humbling themselves.

What is humbleness? Being humble is a virtue in many religious traditions; it is, maybe, a universal virtue. Humbleness is an established social convention in some countries. For example, when someone gives you a special treat in Korea, it is polite to say 'no' at least two times, and to say 'yes' reluctantly when you are asked the third time. If you say 'yes' without hesitation at the first time you are asked, people don't think you are humble. But that's not the humbleness Jesus talks about; in his view humbleness is another name for love.

Imagine how a loving relationship develops. It can be through couples' emptying their hearts, not filling them. If one person in a relationship wants to possess or control the other, that relationship is broken. Only if each person makes a space in their heart, and welcomes the other in that space, can they develop a loving relationship. I think that is a meaning of humbleness: making room for others, making room for differences, and allowing ourselves to learn and be transformed

by both people and experience. Only through humbling ourselves, can we sustain and mature our loving relationships.

Think about how Jesus completed God's will. He knew what was going to happen to him, but he chose to go to Jerusalem. He was afraid of the cross, so he prayed to God "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me", but he made room for God's will, saying "yet, not my will but yours be done". That complete trust and surrender comes from true spiritual depth. His humbleness allowed God's will to be complete.

We all know that we are different from each other. This congregation is diverse both theologically and generationally. We are not afraid to be diverse, because we know the difference between *diversity* and *adversity*. We respect each other's differences – we do not try to erase them.

I can say that my presence here with you is a sign that you've already opened yourselves up to continuing growth through respecting diversity. How could a young minister from far away, who has lived in this country for less than four years, shepherd a congregation whose history spans more than 120 years? It is just amazing that we are here together to worship God, hoping to grow together spiritually and to reach out together to those in need, even though we are different from each other.

How can our diversity be our strength, and help our ministry grow? It is only possible when we humble ourselves before God and before one another. In a world where so many are scrambling for the best seat at the table, we can sit with our good friends and share the blessings God has given us. That is the way Jesus lived, and that is the example we follow.

May we open our doors wide enough to welcome everyone, to share with everyone, and to grow together with our diverse gifts. Thanks be to God.