

Good advice or God's advice?

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Luke seems to mislead us in his description of the dinner exchange we will read in [this Sunday's Gospel lesson](#). He tells us, "When [Jesus] noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable," but the words that follow aren't really parabolic. They're just good advice. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host ... " Can you imagine how embarrassing it would be for the host to say to you, "I'm sorry, but you'll need to move down the table; I've reserved this seat for so-and-so?"

I must confess that this dinner-table advice sticks with me. Whenever I go to someone's house for dinner, I look for the seat of least prominence. Partly, that's because I want to be able to slip out early without anyone noticing, but it's also because of Jesus' advice. I don't really expect anyone to tell me to move to a place of lower status, but I certainly don't want people thinking to themselves, "Oh, look where the preacher is sitting. Who does he think he is?" In fact, this strategy often produces the result Jesus anticipates: a host saying, "No, no, don't sit in the corner; sit over here!" Good advice, Jesus. Thanks.

The only problem is that I've missed the point. And the second half of the Gospel lesson makes that clear.

Jesus said, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Now that's just silly, Jesus. Who would ever do that?

I'm still not convinced that this is a parable, but, when you hold these two pieces of dinner-time instruction together, you get a counter-intuitive, parable-like teaching. In truth, it's pretty silly to give up completely dinner parties with friends and family

so that you can invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. At one level, I think Jesus means this literally. I do think he means that we're supposed to make room at our table for those whom society has left behind. But I also think this second part of the teaching is supposed to drive home the point that Jesus isn't just offering good advice but a teaching about the kingdom.

I choose the lowest seat because it feels good to be humble, and it's nice to be rewarded for my humility. (If you can't tell that's a self-righteous trap, trust me: it is.) But that's not why Jesus urges me to take the lower seat. The earthly benefit is only the introduction. There's a kingdom benefit that Jesus points us to. Take the lowest seat because that's where we find the kingdom—not when the host says, "Move up higher," but when God sees that we've made room for others at the table. Unless we actively participate in the reordering of society—from top to bottom, from rich to poor--we aren't taking part in the kingdom.

Jesus is using the familiar setting of a dinner party to get this point across. Everyone knows not to take the seat of prominence unless it's clear the host wants you there. You don't need Jesus to tell you that. But what Jesus does show us is that our place is on the fringe so that the fringe of society can find a seat at the table. We take the lowest seat as an act of our faith. We abandon any claim we have to power and position because we know that our earthly status doesn't matter the table in God's kingdom. In fact, we recognize that our claim to earthly power actually stands in the way of the fulfillment of God's kingdom. And so we take the lowest seat. And we throw a dinner party for poor strangers. That's God's advice for life in the kingdom.

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