

## Sermon ✝ August 28, 2022

Luke 14:1, 7-14

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When the St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri, sought an individual to become president of the school, a Search Committee was appointed to seek out the best possible choice. As expected, aspirants for the position made themselves known to the committee and well-meaning persons attempted to make the committee's task easier by suggesting they knew "*just the person for the job.*"

The committee sorted through the pile of resumes and persisted with its homework. In time, one name emerged from all of the rest. The committee traveled to the state in which the candidate resided and visited the prominent church where he served. Their observations confirmed what they already knew. The minister's credentials were outstanding. There was no need to spend a great deal of time with him just to satisfy some paper-shuffling. So, they decided to make a rather novel inquiry. They visited the church custodian.

William McElvaney became the president of St. Paul School of Theology on the strength of his outstanding credentials, plus the unreserved recommendation of the church custodian. The Search Committee determined that a man of such spiritual integrity, who respected the church custodian as not being beneath him, was just the man they were looking for.

I like this story . . . partly because it ties in so neatly with today's gospel lesson, but also because it is refreshing to hear a story like this.

We live in a day and age when snob appeal has reached a zenith. In order to be "in" these days one has to wear the right clothes, have their hair done at the right salon, shop in the right grocery stores and eat the right foods, wear the right deodorant . . . and on and on. It is as if Jesus were telling this parable just for us .

Jesus told a story about a man who is invited to a feast and claims the seat of highest honor. He appears to deserve it; he's the outstanding man there. But unexpectedly another guest arrives who clearly deserves the highest place. The first man is escorted from his seat, to his deep chagrin. I'll bet he was mad, don't you?

Imagine what the other guests said: "*You sure got put in your place. You thought you were so good with your fancy clothes and all.*" . . . "*Tonight your just one of the common folks.*" It must have been a most embarrassing situation.

What we're talking about here is more than just plain table manners . . . what we're talking about is called *presumption*. Webster defines presumption as "*taking upon oneself, more than is warranted.*"

The trouble with being presumptuous is that it is a fault which is completely hidden from its owner while all those around can see it plainly.

The guest at the dinner party thought he was completely within his rights by taking the seat of honor . . . never even thinking that someone more important than himself might come along.

Even the psalmist was concerned about being presumptuous:

*“Keep back thy servant also  
from presumptuous sins;  
Let them not have dominion over me.”*

Let’s spend a few minutes looking at a couple of these presumptuous sins. You know, the flaws which escape our notice but appear so repugnant to others and to God.

A classic presumptuous sin is presuming that our sins are forgiven easily. How about this prayer: *“Thank you, God, for my nice home and my new car and all my friends. Bless me in all I undertake, and, God, if I’ve committed any sins, just forgive them, would you?”*

Does God even hear a prayer like that? St. Bernard of Clairvaux called such an attitude a *“dreadful offensiveness.”*

We have become very flippant about sin today... we take it almost as a laughing matter. It is true that God forgives our sins....but it is also true that God demands we be repentant (truly sorry for our offenses).

It is a greater sin to claim God’s forgiveness without reflecting on what it cost and what that forgiveness should mean for our lives. We have these powerful words in our communion liturgy:

*Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal.*

Another presumption is presuming that we know the burdens carried by others . . . perhaps even family members or friends. The truth is: we don't know.

It's always so easy to assume our prayers aren't needed if they are not solicited . . . that there is no trouble unless its mentioned . . . that people are really as happy as they seem.

We are all so proud . . . we think it’s the ultimate shame to ask for help. Don't ever be afraid or ashamed to ask for help.

We have been instructed to “bear one another's burdens.” Which means that we let others into our lives.

Another presumption. Presuming that people know we love them.

It is the classic question asked by Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Tevye keeps asking his wife. Golde, “*Do you love me?*”

She just lists all the things she done for him,

*Do I love you?*

*For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes*

*Cooked your meals, cleaned your house*

*Given you children, milked the cow*

*After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?*

He simply wants the reassurance of those words. It is important to tell your spouse and your children how you feel about them.

We all participate here in this church. Do you regularly tell members of your church family how you feel about them? How about your neighbors or people at work. We all need to hear words of love and encouragement.

We also may presume that people know how we feel about our faith.

I'm not talking about slick bumper stickers or religious pictures on our walls. I'm talking about sharing. I'm talking about the word which shares with a friend the faith we have in Christ. Oh, man, you're thinking . . .

*“Isn't it enough to believe in God and go to church?”*

*“Doesn't the life I live testify for itself?”*

*“Shouldn't my friends be left alone to make up their own minds.”*

*“Won't there be a better time than now?”*

These are all our thoughts and not God's thoughts. The invitation is to come and see the miracles of God in Christ and then to go and tell others. If you find a bargain at the store, you spread the news among your friends. You don't presume that they will find out for themselves.

The same should be true of your relationship with the church . . . something good has happened to you . . . tell the story.

Presumption. It's a subtle sin. The poor guest at the big banquet thought it was his place to sit at the head table.

Boy, was he out of line. It was a dreadful offensiveness.

Let us beware not to allow our presumptuous sins to have dominion over us.

Let us be careful not to take the little things of life for granted.

Let us give God the glory.