

How to Be Human: A Jubilee Spirituality for All of Us - Hospitality and Humility

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[0 : 00] So Tochi is one of the newest members of our preaching team. So she is going to come.

We believe in this community that it is not enough for Anthony and I just to preach. You need many perspectives, many experiences to grow in Christ. So your job is to give her plenty of amens and hallelujahs.

And I've been there to encourage her, all right? All right, that's what we're doing. All right, go for it. You hear me? Okay, perfect.

Hi, everyone. My name is Tochi, Tochi Nguawa. And I'm a mom, a wife, a lawyer, and member of the preaching team at Table Church. Today, I have the honor of speaking on a very important topic, hospitality and humility.

This is a continuation of our summer series, How to Be Human, a Jubilee Spirituality for All of Us. And as we've been going through the book of Luke, we've explored many aspects of humanity through Christ's lens, from Jesus of temptation, to the announcement of his ministry, to the spread of the good news, to the poor, imprisoned, blind, and oppressed.

[1 : 19] In the past two sermons, we looked at abundance and at love. Sorry, the mic is a little... And at the...

Hello? Okay. And at the center of these sermons have been Jubilee Spirituality. How do we take care of the poor, the forgotten, the abandoned, when society has made promises that it hasn't quite fulfilled?

Today, we continue to examine the same paradigm through the occasion of an opportunity that many of us have participated in, a feast. In today's verse, Luke 14, 7 to 24, Jesus extends the invitation to feast to those who may not have initially been invited.

But before doing so, he leaves a piece of advice to both the guests and the hosts in the feast that he's attending. So before we delve into Jesus' parable, let us start by looking at the advice he gives. So, Luke 7. When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them a parable. When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

[2 : 48] If so, the hosts who invited both of you will come and say to you, give this person your seat. Then humiliated, you will have to take the seat of a least important place.

But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, friend, move up to a better place.

Then you will be honored in the presence of the other guests. For all that who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Then Jesus said to the host, When you give a lunch and dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors.

If you do, they might invite you back, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

[3 : 50] Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. So by show of hands, how many of you may have been invited to a party, maybe even a dinner, at some point in your life?

How many of you may have hosted a party, whether a birthday, a holiday party, or a dinner? The likelihood is, at some point or another, we may have found ourselves in some sort of celebration. And this is similar to the social dynamic that takes place in Luke 14, 7 to 14. In Jesus' time, social class was important and was made known by seating at the dinner guests, at banquet dinner.

This includes both Greco-Roman success circles, as well as Palestinian Jewish society. The guests were not just mingling, but in some way, they were vying for a place at the table, as a way to stand out and cement their social standing, to be seen and to be heard.

It is in this context where Jesus was invited to eat at a meal at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, which is supposed to be a fun and joyous occasion.

[5 : 11] Jesus brings down the vibe by reminding the guests, For those who make themselves humble will be humble. Sorry, for those who make themselves great will be humble, and those who humble themselves will be made great.

Despite Jesus' recommendation, the likelihood is that in Roman circles, no one of socially inferior status would arbitrarily be invited forward.

One would only be advanced if they took a very low status, one lower than their own position required. So Jesus' invitation was not to have guests acknowledge their actual position.

It was for them to take on a much lower position. So that the host can invite them to a higher role.

Jesus was inviting the guests to humble themselves. As a first-generation Nigerian-American who grew up in New York City, humility is not always valued in some of my community.

In fact, I often joke, as a Nigerian-New Yorkan, I'm a part of two proud societies, yet I still manage to stay humble. The mere notion of noting that I'm humble kind of undermines the idea of being humble, right?

[6 : 25] The fact is that it's harder to feign humility than actually be humble, especially in communities where that's not really valued. Common sayings for Brooklynites like myself are, big up yourself, or like Nigerians, Nigerian no de las, which means we're not last.

So I can imagine the similarity in Greco-Roman circles, as well as Palestinian Jewish society, that when Jesus advised them, when someone advised you to a wedding feast to sit down in the best, not to sit down in the best place, this kind of went contrary to social customs and norms.

I can only imagine that some of the guests must have thought as they listened to Jesus rebuke them, or something my husband sometimes says, the vibes were probably whack.

The guests at these particular feasts were not likely expecting to be called out by someone who quite frankly didn't invite them in the first place. In all honesty, it was an inconvenient time for Jesus to start preaching at a feast.

Not only was Jesus putting the guests on the spot, he was also putting the hosts on the spot, the very person who invited him. Yet if I really think about it, it's never really a convenient time to be humble.

[7 : 46] For me personally, humility carries a risk of being overlooked, ignored, undervalued, and sometimes passed off as irrelevant.

I wonder if I don't act as a Black woman. These fears are real for me. I often wonder if I don't advocate for myself, who will?

This fear goes back to childhood, seeing my mom, an immigrant woman, not always having enough to feed and make any meat for her five kids. There's a certain insecurity that comes from not rushing to the table and carving out a space for yourself.

And that insecurity may exist for each and every one of us in our own unique ways. Maybe it could be you missing out on a love interest, a work opportunity, a possibility to build community.

It is important to note that Jesus was not highlighting the quorum. Rather, he was pointing to a spiritual reality that he was hoping to reintroduce to Jewish society.

[8 : 57] And this spiritual guidance, this insight, is one that he wanted to make known to all members of the dinner party. The spiritual principle is quoted in Proverbs 25, 6 to 7.

When you stand before the king, don't try to impress him and pretend to be important. It is better to be asked to take a higher position than to be told to give your place to someone more quick.

This spiritual principle could be rephrased in a simple decision. Must you tell the world who you are? Or can you trust God to reveal your value, your identity?

The deeper question is, where does our security and foundation come from? Society's assurances of who we are?

Or God's promises to us as children? This message seems counterintuitive in our culture, where everyone is looking for a seat at the table.

[10 : 01] As a woman of color in corporate America, I sometimes feel the need to force my way into the table too. For example, when I interview, I wonder, if I do not say how great of a person I

am, will anyone hire me?

Or even after getting the job? If I don't broadcast my accomplishments, will I get a promotion? And as I try to advocate for myself and navigate the oppressive structures within a capitalist society, I still am not always successful.

And that may show up in how I'm compensated or how I'm valuing in a team. And I realized how much easier it would be if someone just held the door open rather than me sometimes knocking on the door trying to enter certain tables.

In this day and age, it's not uncommon to be asked, what do you bring to the table? And that question poses itself in many ways, sometimes verbally and sometimes unspoken.

I don't know about you, but I have not always felt worthy of every table that I've been a part of. If I think back my first day, ninth grade at lunchtime, I sat at a table of five girls who were just nicely here, well done, very pretty.

[11 : 22] And when the assistant principal came up to enforce the five-person table, I was one of the six people at the table, I offered to get up, but it wasn't out of humility.

It's because I didn't quite seem like I fit in. I didn't think I was enough. Later on, those girls made the requirement that anyone who sat at the table had to wear the new Jordans in order to be able to maintain their space.

And at that point, I was glad that I was not part of the table. I literally, my parents couldn't afford that. Ironically, it's so hard, sometimes it's so easy to get busy trying to stay at the table that we forget who's left out.

And that's what Jesus' second advice was to the host, to be hospitable, to invite those who do not always get invited to the party. Yet this was contrary to the rules of etiquette.

Then, as today, not only was it common for people to invite their peers, their families, their neighbors to parties, but it was also an unspoken expectation that the guests would invite you back.

[12 : 33] It would be a return invitation. And to Jesus, he responds, you have already been repaid. And instead, if you invite those who cannot repay you, the poor, the lame, the blind, then God will repay you.

I started off this sermon by asking if you've ever been invited to a party. My follow-up question, again, by raise of hands, do you remember a time when you may not have been invited to a party or a position or a table that you really wanted access to?

Whether it's the lunch table that we may have really wanted to sit in or the office table that we are still hoping to get invited to? The hurt that comes from not being invited, that pain exists for some of us here today.

Some of us in this room may have been overlooked, ignored, deemed irrelevant. Yet the good news is that whether we are poor, whether we are blind, whether we are in prison or oppressed, we are all invited to Jesus' party.

It is up to us to accept the invitation. Can we take a second to just think of others we know personally or who may be a part of our communities that we could invite to our tables or table church?

[14 : 06] Are they the sick who don't have the resources or insurance to be able to find healing? Are they the unhoused that have no homes to invite others into their house or even to get ready if they were invited?

Are they the mentally ill in the neighborhoods who have been cast off as unfit but not cared for? Are they the youth who are looking for their place to belong but constantly told what they are not and what they do not amount to?

Are they the single parents that are struggling to provide for their kids whether financially or just with a limited resource of time? Are there ways to create structures for everyone that doesn't have enough even when society or government says otherwise?

Can we heed Jesus' advice on hospitality and invite those who look nothing like us into our community? Who in our table needs a folding chair?

And not necessarily one to attack those that may see on the opposite side but to invite them in. Let's keep them in mind as we read the parable of the banquet.

[15 : 26] As we read this passage let us think how can we extend the table for them and make sure that they also have seats? Let us remember that Jesus allows us to extend our community as far as our compassion will take us.

When one of those at the table with him heard this Jesus he said to Jesus bless us the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Jesus replied a certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited come for everything is now ready.

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said I have just bought a field and I must go and see it. Please excuse me. Another said I have just bought five yokes of oxen and I am on my way to try them out.

Please excuse me. Still another said I just got married so I cannot come. The servant came back and reported this to the master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant go out quickly to the streets and the alleys of the town and bring the poor the crippled the blind and the lame.

[16 : 54] Sir the servant said what you ordered has been done but there is still room. Then the master told his servant go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house will be full and I tell you now one of those who were invited will get a taste of the banquet.

The parable of the great banquet is an example of hospitality and hosting jubilee spirituality even as we don't now experience the fullness of jubilee and the good news that we are all invited the invitation has been extended to all and we get to celebrate with the bridegroom Jesus.

As we close we are reminded of a two-fold message let us not overlook the honor of being invited to the banquet that Christ calls us to let us not get overwhelmed by our hectic day-to-day activities that fill our schedules but rather let us meet the carpenter and nourish our souls.

Secondly we are reminded to who the bridegroom actually came for. The banquet ultimately belongs to those who are considered least in current day society.

They will be honored in due time and wouldn't it be ideal if we were considered to be part of their community and their table in the eyes of Christ.

[18 : 26] Thank you.