

Humble Blessing
Psalm 81:1, 10-16
Luke 14:1, 7-14

A few years ago, I was watching a show on television when I happened to view a preview for an awards show that was bragging about Jennifer Love Hewett being voted as the most “haughty” actress on television. My first thought was that it seemed odd to brag about someone being haughty. So I looked it up. Merriam-Webster defines haughty as, “blatantly and disdainfully proud”.¹ Now perhaps it was the way I was raised, but being blatantly and disdainfully proud does not sound like something I would be joyful to tell others about. Yet this awards show seemed to think that it was a worthy description of Jennifer and was something to be happy about. Perhaps they equated haughty with confident? I don’t know. But it serves as a small example of how our culture has changed over the years.

I can’t imagine Jesus saying, “Go therefore and be haughty!” I can imagine Jesus saying something like, “Go therefore and be humble or go therefore and be a blessing to others.” As I think back in my life of all those who had had a positive impact on my life, the ones that really made an impact were the ones who became a blessing to me. These men and women were not only a blessing to me, but they lived their lives in humility and hospitality.

Thinking about the difference between haughty and humble fits nicely with the illustration Jesus gives to the Sabbath meal guests at the home of one of the Pharisee leaders. As Jesus watched the guests arriving, he noticed how they chose their place at the table. According to common custom, certain places at the table were reserved for those who were to be honored above others. It is much like we might place a bride and groom at the head table, with the bridesmaids and groomsmen on each side of them. In the same way, certain places at the table were known to be the place of honor for important guests.

Imagine, if you will, taking a place of honor, thinking that surely it was where you deserved to be. Then after sitting down, the host comes up to you and asks you to take a lower place because someone more distinguished than you is coming. How embarrassing would that be? Rather than be haughty and assume a place of honor, Jesus reminds us to be humble and take the lowest place of honor that is available! That way, if they host comes up to you and asks you to move, it will not be embarrassing, but a blessing to move to a better place of honor.

Consider this example:

On a visit to the Beethoven museum in Bonn, a young American student became fascinated by the piano on which Beethoven had composed some of his greatest works. She asked the museum guard if she could play a few bars on it; she accompanied the request with a lavish tip, and the guard agreed. The girl went to the piano and tinkled out the opening of the Moonlight Sonata. As she was leaving she said to the guard, "I suppose all the great pianist who come here want to play on that piano."

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/haughty>

The guard shook his head. "Padarewski [the famed Polish pianist] was here a few years ago and he said he wasn't worthy to touch it."²

Regardless of how much we want to pat ourselves on the back, to do so is arrogance and foolish pride. Jesus reminds us that when we live our lives, we should do so in such a way that we become a blessing to others. He mentions one way to do that is to have dinners in which you invite people who cannot reciprocate the offer. Rather than entertain guests who can return the favor or invite us to more lavish dining, invite persons who are not able to repay the offer. Invite persons who really need the food and the fellowship. Perhaps this is someone who is lonely or grieving. Perhaps it is someone who is struggling to keep her family fed. Practicing this kind of hospitality is not something we do to enable others to live off the system, but to show God's merciful and caring love.

Part of being a humble blessing to others is not only how we initially deal with people, but also how we finish our time with people. Sometimes we are caught in a haughty moment and have to make up for our selfish actions. Consider how this professor made up for his actions:

Many years ago, Christian professor Stuart Blackie of the University of Edinburgh was listening to his students as they presented oral readings. When one young man rose to begin his recitation, he held his book in the wrong hand. The professor thundered, "Take your book in your right hand, and be seated!" At this harsh rebuke, the student held up his right arm. He didn't have a right hand! The other students shifted uneasily in their chairs. For a moment the professor hesitated. Then he made his way to the student, put his arm around him, and with tears streaming from his eyes, said, "I never knew about it. Please, will you forgive me?" His humble apology made a lasting impact on that young man. This story was told some time later in a large gathering of believers. At the close of the meeting a man came forward, turned to the crowd, and raised his right arm. It ended at the wrist. He said, "I was that student. Professor Blackie led me to Christ. But he never could have done it if he had not made the wrong right."³

Practicing humble hospitality, forgiveness, and making amends are just a few examples of how we can be blessings to others. There are times in our lives when it is not what we say, but how we act that gets noticed. I recently had a speeding car tailgate me and then pass me in a no passing zone. I remember thinking how I hoped he would get caught. I also recently encountered a driver who was gracious and kind. At an all way stop, we arrived about the same time and he motioned me on as he patiently waited for me to go. I remember thinking how kind his driving was. No words, just actions led me to these impressions of these drivers. I am sure you have had similar encounters. So too, whether we are haughty or humble, people notice. A haughty attitude does not lead us to be a blessing to others, but a humble attitude can open the door for a multitude of blessings. May you go out into the world and be humble blessings to everyone you encounter. Amen.

² <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/humility.htm>

³ *Ibid.*

Prayer:

Help us, O Lord, to be your humble people. Make us blessings to those we meet and open our lives to be living examples of your love for others. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.