



## Thought for the Week 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Luke 14

<sup>1</sup>One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. <sup>2</sup>And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. <sup>3</sup>And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" <sup>4</sup>But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. <sup>5</sup>And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son<sup>[a]</sup> or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" <sup>6</sup>And they could not reply to these things.

<sup>7</sup>Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honour, saying to them, <sup>8</sup>"When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honour, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, <sup>9</sup>and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person', and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup>But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at table with you. <sup>11</sup>For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

<sup>12</sup>He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers<sup>[b]</sup> or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup>and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

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There once was a frog who talked two friendly geese into flying him south for the winter. The frog prepared for the trip by tying the ends of a long, stout cord to each of the geese. With his strong jaws, he grabbed on to the cord at its middle, and the trio took off. The journey was going well until someone on the ground looked up and observed the unusual flight formation. "Hey, that's terrific," the astonished spectator shouted. "Who's idea was that?" In his anxiety to take full credit for the performance, the proud frog opened his mouth and said "It was mine!"

On another occasion a large crowd had gathered near a pond in a public zoo. The people watched admiringly as a peacock slowly spread its great tail and displayed its stunning plumage. The great bird stood erect and noble, and strutted around in great pride. Just then, a very ordinary old duck waddled awkwardly from the pond and passed between the proud peacock and the admiring crowd. Enraged by this interruption, the peacock drove the duck back into the water. Immediately, the beautiful bird had become ugly with fierce anger. But the old brown duck, having returned to its natural habitat, no longer seemed so ugly. In the water, it swam and dived gracefully, unaware that many eyes were watching it instead of the proud peacock.

[We read in Luke chapter 14 about] There is an episode recorded in the Gospel of Luke [chapter 14] in which Jesus is having a Sabbath meal with other invited guests at the home of a leading Pharisee. Jesus knew he was under scrutiny and when he saw a man walk by who had dropsy (old-term for oedema or swelling of the limbs) he raised the level of the general conversation with a controversial question about whether or not it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. The religious guests didn't answer him, so Jesus went ahead and healed the man.

Knowing that this infuriated the Pharisees, Jesus went on to tell a timeless parable on humility which hit home even harder!

*"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in a place of honour. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, 'Give up your place to this man.' And then, to your embarrassment, you would have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, 'My friend, move up higher.' In that way, everyone with you at the table will see you honoured. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Humility is an important part of the Christian life. It has been said, "Christian humility is a sweet spiritual blessing. It leaves a good taste in one's soul!" The problem for us is that we are living in an Age that fosters and supports a very different and much more aggressive style of life. We are taught the supreme value of "getting ahead." But easy acceptance of the way things are, in a world of winners and losers, adds up to easy rejection of the Gospel standard of humility.

A bright, young student who had just completed his A levels with straight A's and was about to go to Oxford University was rewarded by his parents with a trip to the Far East for the summer before starting his studies. While there he met a guru who said to him, "Don't you see how you are poisoning your soul with this success-oriented way of life? Your idea of happiness is to stay up all night studying for an exam so you can get a better grade than your best friend. Your idea of a good marriage is not to find the woman who will make you whole, but to win the girl that everyone else wants. That's not how people are supposed to live. Give it up; come join us in an atmosphere where we all share and love each other."

The young man had been working very hard for several years and he was ripe for this sort of approach. He 'phoned his parents and told them he would not be coming home. He was dropping out of school to live in an ashram. Six months later, his parents got a letter from him: "Dear Mom and Dad, I know you weren't happy with the decision I made last summer, but I want to tell you how happy it has made me. For the first time in my life, I am at peace. Here we are all absolutely equal, and we all share everything. This way of life is so much in harmony with the inner essence of my soul that in only six months I've become the number two disciple in the entire ashram - and I think I can be number one disciple by June!" We may smile at that, but the competitive push-yourself-forward attitude is surprisingly deeply ingrained in all of us. Yet it is so contrary to what the Bible teaches us about the Christian life.

At the top of his Church News Bulletin, a minister printed this motto ... "LIFE IS A LOVE, NOT A COMPETITION." Later, on Sunday afternoon, his telephone rang. "You are wrong," the caller said, "Life *is* a competition. It's easy for you to print nice-sounding phrases, but we live in a real world, where life *is* a competition." Indeed, the world around us makes it inconceivable to many Christians that life *is* a love, and not a competition. But, this is precisely the point Jesus makes when He speaks of humility -- when He asks us to trust in the abundant joys that will belong to those who are not preoccupied with obtaining status and prestige.

In Matthew chapter 20, Jesus tells a story about some workers in a vineyard. Some worked all day, others were added to the workforce at various times right up until near the end of the day. Then, at the end they were all paid exactly the same wage. The men who had worked all day were not best pleased with this and complained bitterly. But Jesus concludes the parable by showing that they were really just greedy, highly competitive men when he said, "[The last shall be first, and the first, last,](#)" (Mt. 20:16). We can embrace the modern world's "dog-eat-dog" philosophy of fierce competition, or we can trust in the Lord Jesus who tells us that we have come, not to be served, but to serve.

The Native Americans teach a parable in which a grandfather tells his grandchildren that people are born with two wolves inside of them. One wolf is aggressive and likes to do harm, while the other is not aggressive and likes to spread love and compassion. "Which one will grow and win out in me?" the grandchild asks. "The one which you feed," says the grandfather. There is enormous truth in that. What part of you are you feeding?

Today as we come to sit around the table of our Lord Jesus Christ and feed on him we are reminded of the supreme example of humility and not putting oneself first. We need to remember Jesus, who, as Paul puts it when writing to the Philippian church,

**"Who being in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ... humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross." [Phil 2:6-8]**

Jesus, the Son of God, could have commanded countless armies of angels from heaven to come and rescue him before they had a chance to drive those rough nails through his hands. Even before that, he could have "zapped" out of existence those who opposed him – just like the comic strip heroes always do. He had the common people eating out of his hands – he would have had no trouble at all rallying them behind him and proclaiming himself king of Israel.

If he had, he would have gone down in the history books as a great leader probably outshining others such as Alexander the Great. But he couldn't have been the Saviour of the World!

For that was not God's way. He had to be humble and suffer the lowest form of humility – hanging in shame on a Roman execution cross. He took the lowest place to earn for us the highest place that we did not deserve. Let us be reminded of that today as we once again break the bread and drink the wine. Jesus Christ suffered the utmost humility in his own body for you and for me. And let us learn from his example and go against the flow of the world in taking the lowest seat.

As we share together let us learn from our Lord and resolve to follow his example, remembering his words:

**"The last will be first, and the first, last!"**

**"For what then will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life?"**

**"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

Amen.

### **PCI Let's Pray**

**Sunday 9 May**

Moderator

As congregations in the Republic have been prevented from worshipping face to face for many months, pray for their encouragement as some restrictions may ease in coming weeks.

Worshipping God with desire

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.' Psalm 42:1.

With such a long period of being unable to gather to worship God, pray that our desire for him and to meet together as his people would be undimmed.

## Monday 10 May

### Covid-19

Pray for all affected by Covid-19 around the world; those who have the virus, those recovering from the virus, and those who have lost loved ones. Pray for people around the world who are suffering due to pressures on healthcare systems and those suffering great hardship due to economic effects of the pandemic.

### India

Pray especially for the people of India where the pandemic is devastating. Sadly, a number of ministers of our partner the Church of North India have died. Pray for the church at this difficult time.

## Tuesday 11 May

### Healthcare Chaplains

Pray for all involved in PCI healthcare chaplaincy work. Pray that they will bring words of reassurance, comfort, strength and encouragement to patients, staff and family members.

### Kilkenny

Give thanks that online Bible Study and Fellowship Groups are continuing during the challenges of vacancy and lockdown. Ask the Lord to guide and bless the congregation, and pray that very soon it would be possible to appoint a new minister. Pray too for Rev David Conkey (vacancy convener).

## Wednesday 12 May

### Edwin & Anne Kibathi (global mission workers to East Africans in the UK)

Give thanks that the congregation in London and fellowship groups in England are now starting to meet in-person and remember them in prayer.

### South Sudan

Pray for the ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan as well as their peace-building and humanitarian work. The United Nations recently warned that the slow pace of reforms and political disputes risks the return of a large-scale conflict. Pray for wise political leadership, progress and peace.

## Thursday 13 May

### Forces Chaplains

There are currently 10 ministers serving full-time as chaplains across the three services in the UK. Most are based at home; some are deployed overseas. Often, they can be away from home and family for long periods of time. Pray for their safety, their families and their ongoing ministry to service personnel of all ranks.

### Limerick

Pray for Rev Stephen Hancock and the United Presbyterian and Methodist congregation of Limerick.

## Friday 14 May

### Social Witness

Pray for all aspects of Older Peoples Services as they continue to work in a stressful and challenging environment. Pray for our residents as they look forward to a more relaxed visiting regime. Give thanks to our Heavenly Father, that we are again Covid-19 free in our homes.

### Council for Public Affairs

A number of the Council's Panels are meeting around this time. Pray for them as they consider the Church's voice on different issues in the public square including education, peace and reconciliation, human identity, wellbeing and welfare.

## Saturday 15 May

### General Council

Pray for the Clerk of the General Assembly, the Rev Trevor Gribben in his ongoing work, especially in terms of his liaison with other churches and governments in relation to Covid-19. Pray for the meeting of the four Clerks of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland taking place this week.

### Council for Training in Ministry

Refresher training for Accredited Preachers is provided annually so they can develop their thinking and practice of preaching. Andrew Faulkner is leading the training this year, which will be online. Give thanks for Accredited Preachers throughout Ireland, and pray that the Lord would bless them through this training, and use them as they lead worship and preach his word.