

Glen Ridge Congregational Church
The Rev. John Sampson
“The Economy of Humility”



Gold Picture Frame, Anonymous

Luke 14:1, 7 - 14
August 31, 2025

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you,
our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

So, if you didn't know it before, from the readings over the last couple of weeks it should be clear that when you hear it was the Sabbath, things are about to go down. Jesus is going to do something that is really going to get people upset. Some people, not all the people, but some people are really going to get the dander flying.

I'm not sure if you noticed when Sherry read the verse numbers that we would be reading, or maybe you saw it in the bulletin, but there's a break in the verses. We start at verse one and then we go to verse seven. What happens in those missing verses is that Jesus performs another healing. It's the Sabbath and he meets a man who has dropsy. Dropsy is a kind of inflammation, a kind of edema, and he heals this man. And not everybody's happy because it happens on the Sabbath.

When we hear passages like this where Jesus does a healing and then he says something, it's not as if they're two different things. It's often the same thing just done in different ways.

Jesus heals a man from his physical swelling in the passage we don't hear. And then in the passage we do hear, he tries to heal all of us from a different kind of swelling. The swelling of our egos, the swelling of our sense of self, the swelling of ourselves that drives us to do things so that we will get something in return.

The first story is one about people coming to a marriage banquet and where one sits at a marriage banquet. And I don't know if any of you have planned a wedding, but that can often be a contentious moment, can't it? Who's sitting at this table? Well, if we sit this one at this table, that one's got to sit there, too. And I don't really like that person. So, where are we going to seat them?

As the pastor, when I get invited to wedding celebrations, I'm always seated at the last table with the leftovers because they don't know what to do with me. And that's okay.

The second story is about who will you invite? Not where you will sit at this marriage celebration when you are invited, but who will you invite to your own table and your own banquet.

In both cases, Jesus asks us to deflate ourselves, to become humble, not look out for the best seat, not invite the best people, but to open ourselves to humility. What does it mean to be humble in the community that Jesus is trying to build here and now? Not just with people of long ago, but the community that Jesus is inviting us to. What does humility look like in this place? It looks like giving up your seat. It looks like inviting people who could never repay you.

We live in a society in which we have a certain understanding of economy, and I don't mean just financial economy, but all the economies: political, social, familial, the way in which goods and services and relationships function. I do something for you because you're going to do something for me. I don't want to do that because what's in it for me?

In the community, in the communion, that Christ is inviting us to, he breaks apart that sense of give and take, that sense of economy. He asks us to do things not because we're going to get something in return, but because it is the right thing to do. It is the loving thing to do. It is the thing that we should do because we are all made in God's image.

Who do you invite to your banquet? The poor, the marginalized, the people who can never repay you. And when we hear these words, we can think that is the most impractical thing we have ever heard. And it might be, but that doesn't mean that Christ isn't still asking us to do it.

We are a community that is thinking about our future. And the way that I often hear this is we need to get so and so because they're going to be part of our stewardship campaign. We need to get young families because they've got to be in the pews. They're our future. Often

when we think about who we're going to invite into these pews, which have so much space, we think about who we can invite because they're going to give something back to us.

But Christ is challenging us, in this very moment, when we think about who will fill these pews to think not of inviting those who are going to give something back to us but who are the people we can serve. Who are the people who need to eat the spiritual food that God has to offer even if they can never repay? It's a different way of thinking about who we might go out of these doors to invite to come in, where we show up to share God's message. An invitation in this wider world.

For the image on the cover of the bulletin, I chose a mirror that has no reflection. Because in our way of thinking, we always think we're going to look in a mirror to see ourselves. We're going to get back something from that mirror. Mirror, mirror on the wall. Who's the fairest of them all? And we hope to see ourselves.

But in Christ's communion, there is no reflection back. We're inviting people not to come here to give us something. We're looking out to offer something to those who are not, may not, be anything like us. To those whose image doesn't replicate our image. If anything, we look into the mirror of the world, we don't see ourselves in this communion. We see God's hurting people. It may seem an impractical dream. It may seem like, how are we going to keep this beautiful church running if the people who are invited aren't young, don't have kids, don't have the money to support our mission here.

And I think Christ challenges us to take a leap of faith and put our trust in God that God's plan actually will bear a fruit that none of us can even imagine. Will we trust these stories of the one we call the Christ? Or will we put our faith in our own sense of how economics works for this moment?

Let us choose God's plan for the life of this church. Let us look into that mirror, not looking for ourselves, but looking to see the image of those who so badly need to hear the good news for the life of this church. Let us open wide the doors to God's banquet.

Amen.