

Proper 17, Luke 14:1, 7-14
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
August 31, 2025

Let the words of my lips and the thoughts of all our hearts offer praise and thanks to God. Amen.

About ten years ago, my husband and I gave our daughter the wedding she had always dreamed of. We gladly and enthusiastically paid for everything. She gladly and enthusiastically did all of the planning for it. Literally all Charles and I had to do was write checks and show up. She planned EVERYTHING - from the location, to the food and drinks, the flowers, the band for the reception, the entertainment for the after party. EVERYTHING. She did not even want me to officiate. She wanted me to just be her mom that day. She asked the priest who had been her priest for her whole life to be the officiant. Even though he had retired, he was glad to ask God to bless her marriage. After all, he asked God to baptize and confirm her.

My daughter is quite the planner. Ever since she was about ten years old she planned her own birthday parties and she even planned and executed all of her baby brothers' birthday parties. She was so good at planning her wedding. She had spreadsheets for everything down to the wedding party's accommodations and the menus. She knew who was coming and she knew precisely where each guest would sit at the wedding reception which was a sit-down dinner. I remember helping her figure out who my friends would prefer to sit with. But that was the extent of my participation. She had place cards designed according to the theme of her party. After the vows, everyone gathered under an enormous tent and took their time searching for their seats. I was then and am still very proud of her for taking that job on and doing it so well.

In Jesus' day, placecards for guests was not customary. It seems placement of guests at the table was more fluid. In fact, according to the gospel text for today, a person could decide for him or herself whether they belonged at the table of honor and take a seat there or decide to sit inconspicuously with those who held less status. Seating was a matter of one's own pride in

Proper 17, Luke 14:1, 7-14
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
August 31, 2025

oneself, apparently. Let's consider the story that Jesus told that day. He said when invited to a wedding banquet one should not take a seat at the table of honor unless the host offers a seat there. Taking that seat would risk being embarrassed if the host should come and ask you to move because someone more honorable than yourself had arrived and deserved that seat.

What would possess a person to assume they were worthy of a special kind of honor? Imagine just walking into a banquet, a wedding reception for instance, and seeing empty seats at the main table. You can imagine that it would take a puffed up sense of self worth to put yourself into one of those seats uninvited, wouldn't it? There are many examples in the Bible of people making assumptions about themselves like that and then being brought low when the truth became clear to them. I recall Joseph's brothers, the brothers of Joseph who was given a coat of many colors by his father. Those were the brothers who threw Joseph into a pit to dispose of him thinking they deserved more love from their father than they were getting. They thought getting rid of the one who had been given honor would put them automatically in the honor seat. The truth was eventually revealed to them that Joseph was indeed the wisest and most generous among them. Joseph deserved the honor he had been given and Joseph, and God, forgave them for their hubris. Then you might think of Saul who became Paul. Saul had been puffed up about himself and his power to control and his need to force his way that he thought was the way of honor on everyone. He thought that getting rid of the people who followed a man who was getting in his way would earn him a seat of honor. Then he met the risen Christ and learned what true honor was. Joseph's brothers' pride and Saul's pride were very nearly their downfall. What they learned when true honor confronted them was humility.

Proper 17, Luke 14:1, 7-14
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
August 31, 2025

Humility and pride are both located on the spectrum of that is the emotion connected with self-esteem. That spectrum moves from low self-esteem, to healthy humility, to healthy pride to excessive pride. Humility counters pride in the same way that charity counters greed. The Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas defined pride as inordinate or excessive self love. Saint Augustine of Hippo defined pride “figuratively as being “curved into oneself” (*curvatus in se*), like an ingrown toenail that causes infection—suggesting that pride distorts us from within, causing us to center all attention and affection on ourselves, thus hindering our ability to love others. And I like Bishop Robert Barron’s description of pride as an attitude that prevents a person from getting in touch with his or her true self. He likens it to the black hole in the universe. Instead of radiating out from the center, everything is drawn into the comparative small, dark and narrow space of the self.

Another theologian, Paul Tillich, suggests that the kind of pride that leads to hubris is born of fear, that fear that our lives will not last forever. In other words, according to Tillich, humans develop excessive pride as an act of instinctive self protection. Humans want to make the most impact that they can in their relatively short lives.

The pursuit of making a mark, making a name for oneself, can lead a person down along the self-regard spectrum toward excessive pride. But not all pride is bad, like the pride I have for my daughter’s organizational skills. That is born of recognized achievement. There are other positive connotations of pride, too, such as confidence and self-respect, and pride in identifying with a community of people by birth or by preference. The positive aspect of pride is healthy for the individual and for communities. But there are costs associated with the unhealthy aspects of pride. These are the aspects of pride that caused pride to be classified as the deadliest of all seven

Proper 17, Luke 14:1, 7-14
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
August 31, 2025

of the deadly sins. The negative aspects of unhealthy pride can do harm to other people and they can do great harm to the people who choose to manifest them. Those aspects of pride are arrogance and an overbearing sense of self-importance. It is that kind of pride that seems to be driving the person in Jesus' story. Why else would he presume to claim a seat at the table of honor without being invited to do so? Was he subconsciously fearful of never being invited to a seat of honor? Might he have been truly in need not of a seat of honor but of a dose of humility?

Jesus says it is perfect love that casts out all fear. Perfect love is elusive on the pride end of the spectrum of self-esteem and self-regard. To draw back to Bishop Barron's image of the black hole of hubris and pride, humility can get a person out of the black hole of self centeredness and lead a person into true being, true reality; to the archetype of truth itself which is Christ Jesus.

The key to understanding humility is from the etymology of that word. It comes from the Latin word *humus*, meaning earth or ground. That means, then, that to be humble means to be down to earth, to be grounded, to be in touch with what is really real and true. Perfect love can only be found where humility and groundedness abounds. Where there is humility, love radiates out from the center of the self to others... to all others.

I want to close with some words from Paul's letter to the Colossians. The church in Colossae was being threatened by outside forces that were taking their attention away from the teachings of Jesus and leading them to confusion and division. Remember that earlier I referred to Paul as having been humbled by his encounter with Christ; an encounter that grounded him in true faith. Here is what part of that letter says about humility from Colossians Chapter 3:

Proper 17, Luke 14:1, 7-14
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
August 31, 2025

8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: **anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language** from your lips.

9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your **old self with its practices**

10 and have put on the **new self**, which is being **renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator**.

11 Here there is no **Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all**.

12 Therefore, as God's **chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience**.

13 **Bear with each other and forgive one another** if any of you has a grievance against someone. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you**.

14 And over all these virtues **put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity**.

Friends, we have Biblical stories and letters to guide us. Turn away from the hardness of hubris and open your hearts in humility. Guard them with the armor of God's love and let that love bind you to Christ and to each other. Amen