

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for our responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book. Today, we will be reading Psalm 25, found on page 13. To you, oh God, I lift up my soul. My God, I put my trust in you. Let me not be humiliated nor let my enemies triumph over me.

Congregation:

Let none who look to you be put to shame. let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Show me your ways, oh God, and teach me your paths.

Congregation:

Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation, in you have I trusted all the day long.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Remember, oh God, your compassion and love, for they are from everlasting.

Congregation:

Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions. Remember me according to your love and for the sake of your goodness, oh God.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Gracious and upright are you, therefore you teach sinners in your way.

Congregations:

You guide the humble in doing right and teach your way to the lowly.

Laurie Sedgwick:

All your paths are love and faithfulness to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.

Speaker 2:

Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for my hope has been in thee.

Choir:

(Singing)

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The Rev. Daniel Smith:

Our reading today comes from the Gospel of Luke, from chapter 14. On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely. When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. When you were invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor. In case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place." And then in disgrace, you would start to take the lowest place.

But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place so that when your host comes he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher." Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Here ends our reading. May it be blessed to our understanding.

Forgive me if you've heard this opener before, but whenever I'm in this space, I can't help but recall the good Reverend Peter [inaudible 00:09:37] of Blessed Memory. For many years, he was a much beloved mentor, colleague, and friend. And whenever I think of our passage from Luke, I can't help but remember Peter's remarkable penchant for entertaining. He would throw fabulous parties, three course meals, weekly community teas where anyone could show up, no Harvard ID required. And at some point over the years, it dawned on me that his high class posting was grounded less in the book of Martha Stewart than in the good book itself, and in a deep and very regular spiritual practice of Christian hospitality.

I also began to wonder how many others left his house feeling like they had just been a guest in one of Jesus' home parables. Whether at a dinner for eight or 28, for students, staff, friends, faculty, he would often place the evening's menu and name cards at each setting. [inaudible 00:10:48] endlessly leafed tables. He'd never fail to ring the dinner gong. And at some level I think he knew all this preparation and lavishness could be intimidating or intoxicating for his guests who were sometimes strangers to one another. So he would often say a remarkable thing just after grace. It went something like this. "If you're tempted to take issue with my seating chart, just remember, the person sitting next to you is the most interesting person in the room. Think about it, enjoy."

And just like that, his guests would take a breath and a sip and inevitably turn to their neighbors with relaxed and renewed curiosity. So think about it. Go ahead. Now it works for every setting where people are gathering. It might have worked better if we were in the Appleton Chapel like I thought we were going to be, but consider the person sitting near you, whether you know them or not, consider that person is the most interesting person in the room. And now consider that they are thinking the very same of you.

In one brilliant and beautiful line, Peter would level the playing field simultaneously deflating and de-centering the egos of some and building up and centering those of others. Our text for today makes me think if Jesus were at Peter's table, I have to imagine him giving the good Rev a knowing smile and raising a glass to his albeit enigmatic gesture of genuine hospitality.

It was as biblical and Christ-like as they come. It both humbled the exalted and exalted the humble. These stories have come to mind recently as we are all bringing more intentionality than ever to how we gather, how inclusive we are being, how we take space and make space in classroom, boardroom, and community. Jesus' wisdom on the subject appears to prioritize humility. Always a good bet. But in fact, it's really about both humility and exaltation. It all depends on where you are seated.

In a place of so many interesting and distinguished people as this, perhaps we can all use this double edged reminder. On the one hand, wherever you gather with others, indeed humble yourself. Believe that others are more interesting, more distinguished, more exalted than you, and why shouldn't they be especially when we can't begin to know their full stories. It invites us to check our knee-jerk judgments, it exhorts curiosity about our every neighbor. On the other hand, if you are struggling with self-doubt, feeling less secure and like you don't belong, here in lies a great gift of assurance. You're sitting low one day, maybe even today, Jesus says it best, move up higher, like claims that wondrously equalizing gift of your God given dignity. Besides in God's eyes, you are always the most interesting person in the room for God is always, always by your side. Think about it. Next time you are at a table, in a classroom, even your next meeting this morning, think about it, enjoy, and let the humble be exalted and the exalted be humbled. Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And now please stand as you are able and once you pray with me, eternal father, through your spirit delighting in the world, you created us from joy and for joy. Grant us a deeper knowledge of the peace which is ours in Christ, Jesus, that here our hearts may be glad and in the world to come our joy may be full, for with the Son and the Holy Spirit, you are our God now and forever. And now let us pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us saying.

Congregation:

Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And let us sing the hymn, We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessing, number 27 found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(Singing)

Laurie Sedgwick:

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Lord, grant me the strength to do what has to be done today and wisdom calmly to leave on one side what cannot be done. Fill me with prayer, draw together my scattered preoccupations, and help me to respond to every moment with my full attention, for your love sake. Amen.