

Humility & Hospitality

Pastor Charlie Berthoud

Sunday, March 30, 2025

“Humility & Hospitality” | Luke 14:1, 7-14 | Pastor Charlie Berthoud

We are just about in the middle of Lent, the holy season that began on Ash Wednesday, March 5 and is over by Easter Sunday, April 20.

In Lent, Christians specifically focus on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We remember that he came to proclaim the good news of God’s new reality in the Kingdom, to call people to a new way of living, to stand up to the powers of evil, and to discover abundant and eternal life, right here on earth.

To help us enter into this new life, Lent is a time for Christians to engage more deeply in practices like fasting and praying.

Here at Covenant, we are blessed with our Lenten banner, which invites us to be prayerful, as Jesus was.

Lent is also traditionally a time of baptismal preparation and membership, so it’s appropriate that we’re welcoming 11 new members this week and next week, and we’re several confirmation youth on the Sunday after Easter.

In Holy Week, just two weeks from today, we wave our palm branches on Palm Sunday, following Jesus into Jerusalem, where he was acclaimed a King, arrested as a threat to the political powers, convicted, and executed on a cross. On Easter Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, which gives us hope in the face of evil and sin and death.

That’s the big picture.

This year in Lent, we’re focusing on bread.

We’re thinking about how Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” and how he came to feed people who were hungry for food and hungry for meaning and purpose. So, we’ve been looking at some of the many gospel accounts of Jesus and food. The reality is that the gospels are full of meals and food. Apparently, Jesus liked to eat! And more importantly,

he recognized that food and meals give opportunities for us to learn about God's ways.

Today our reading comes from Luke 14, which is right in the middle of the long section of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. We'll hear two short parables, which focus on God's calling to humility and hospitality.

As you hear these parables, remember that parables are simple stories with deeper meanings. A parable about seeds isn't about farming techniques. And these parables about meals aren't simply about how to throw a successful dinner party.

Listen for God's word.

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees 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 are 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."

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Right out of seminary, I spent four years as the Associate Pastor at a church in suburban Philadelphia. I was young and had a lot to learn. Fortunately, God blessed me with a wonderful mentor.

Jim was the senior pastor and he had been at the church several years before my arrival. One Sunday soon after I started, we walked out of the building together, and he started across the parking lot. I noticed his car in the way far corner of the big parking lot. I knew he got to church before anyone else, so I asked why he parked way back there. With a

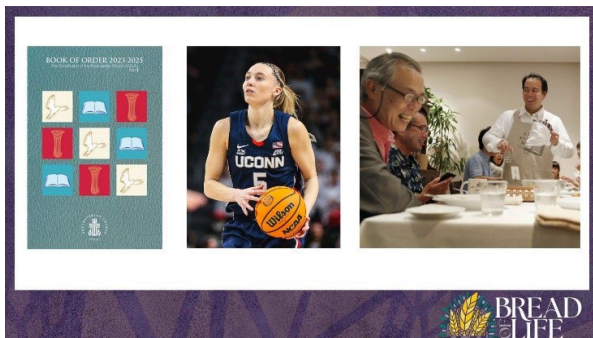
smile he said something about being in good health and not having to escort children into the building, so he left the closer spots for families with young children and people with mobility issues.

Jim was warm, gracious, and wise, and he did countless “little things” like parking at the back of the parking lot that exhibited the kingdom values of humility and hospitality.

I’ve been grateful for Jim and other faithful Christians who have inspired me in my journey, who reflect the spirit of Philippians 2, where Paul encourages Christians to be humble and to take on the mind of Christ.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.
(Phlp 2.3-5)

I imagine we all have people in our lives who are humble and hospitable. But humility is tricky, in that we rarely see it. Truly humble people are looking to be noticed. So in the spirit of a classic three-point sermon, I have three other examples of humility and hospitality, relating to food, in the spirit of our series and of the gospel in Luke 14.



By way of preview, the three examples of humility and hospitality are: The constitution of the Presbyterian Church, basketball superstar Paige Bueckers, and a Japanese restaurant.

I’m starting with the constitution of the Presbyterian Church, which is obviously (!) the most interesting and compelling example.

The Book of Order is something of a theological operations manual for the church. There is a section on worship, with guidelines for communion, also known as the Lord’s Supper.

Through church history, there has been much debate about how to celebrate communion, which is the holy meal commemorating the last supper. Church leaders wanted to maintain the dignity and solemnity of the holy meal, so much so that was a time when pastors would meet with people before communion, to make sure their sins were confessed and their mindset was good. One of the primary responsibilities of pastors according to our tradition and the Book of Order is proper administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Traditionally the language for Presbyterians was that only baptized believers were welcome to receive the Lord's Supper. The historical term for making sure communion was done properly is "fencing the table" which doesn't sound very hospitable.

It was a well-intentioned effort to make communion meaningful, but it had the effect of excluding people who were beginning to explore faith. And looking at the gospels, like our reading today, we see how Jesus routinely welcomed everyone to meals together.

So, I was glad when the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church was officially amended in 2016, with Amendment 16-G at the 222nd General Assembly, so that the *Book of Order* section on communion now officially reflects what seems to be a more hospitable welcome. Instead of saying communion is only for baptized believers, it now says:

The opportunity to eat and drink with Christ is not a right bestowed upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love. All who come to the table are offered the bread and cup, regardless of their age or understanding.

If some of those who come have not yet been baptized, an invitation, when appropriate, to baptismal preparation and Baptism should be graciously extended.

Worshippers prepare themselves to celebrate the Lord's Supper by putting their trust in Christ, confessing their sin, and seeking reconciliation with God and one another. Even those who doubt may come to the table in order to be assured of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ. BOO W-3.0409

I'm glad to be part of church that continues to work on being more inclusive, more hospitable, and more humble.

Here at Covenant, we have communion on the first Sunday of the month, which means next Sunday. And we have it on special occasions, like our Wednesday worship gatherings, and this year we're having communion on Easter Sunday, April 20.

We take communion seriously, but we also welcome everyone.

The second example of humility and hospitality comes from the University of Connecticut women's basketball team. Yes I'm from Connecticut and yes I've been a Huskies fans since I was ten years old, but the example is legit.

One of the best players in the nation is senior Paige Bueckers, who actually grew up in

Minnesota and is a Christian. She openly thanks God for her abilities and cites Bible verses regularly.

So, it might be a bit surprising to learn that her roommate is a Muslim. Her name is Jana El Alfy and she's from Egypt.



As you many know, the holy season of Ramadan is a month long holy season for Muslims and devout Muslims will fast from food and water from sun up until sun down. This is quite a challenge for anyone, but especially for elite athletes. But El Alfy is devout and she is fasting even during the NCAA tournament.

Ramadan ended yesterday.

In the last week or so the story broke that Bueckers, the Christian, gets up before dawn to make eggs and avocado toast for her roommate, so she can be well nourished through the day. El Alfy says that Bueckers makes really good food.

<https://sports.yahoo.com/article/uconn-star-paige-bueckers-waking-213358400.html>

What a kind and gracious gesture, especially at a time with so much hostility toward Muslims and toward people from other countries.

Apparently getting up early hasn't hurt Bueckers game. She scored a career high of 40 points yesterday and UConn trounced Oklahoma 82-59.

Our third example of humility and hospitality is a Japanese restaurant, known as the Restaurant of Mistaken Orders. It's a pop up restaurant, appearing in various Tokyo locations for a limited time, and while they have high quality food from top chefs, their waitstaff is all people with dementia.

So, as the name of the restaurant suggests, some of the orders get mixed up. In fact, according to their website, 37% of people get a mistaken order—the wrong food or drink, the wrong side dish. Sometimes a waitstaff takes a sip of a patron's drink.





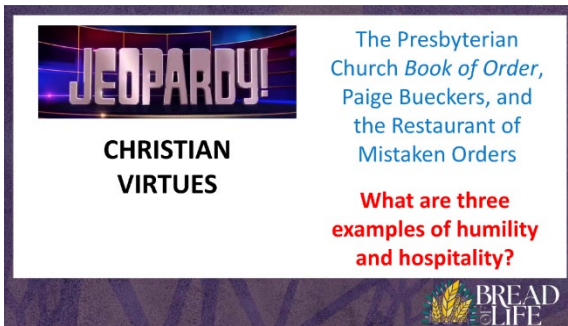
But the amazing thing is that 99% of patrons are satisfied. They apparently realize that being kind and laughing together is more important than getting the food you ordered. And it's better than getting cranky with the restaurant staff.

<https://youtu.be/6D8uPmWUQRc>

[Forbes magazine on Restaurant of Mistaken Orders](#)

So, there are your three examples of humility and hospitality.

I share them with the hope that you'll be on the lookout for other examples, so that we all can grow more humble, more hospitable, more Christ-like.



And, I shared these examples so that if by chance you're ever on the show Jeopardy, you'll be prepared for the time when the category is CHRISTIAN VIRTUES, and when you take CHRISTIAN VIRTUES for 1000 and you see "The Presbyterian Book of Order, Paige Bueckers, and the Restaurant of Mistaken Orders.

Then you'll know that the correct question is "what are three examples of humility and hospitality."

Friends the Good News of the gospel that we **LEARN** from Luke 14 is God's kingdom is a place of humility and hospitality, so that we're ALL welcome at the table, and the bread of life is for everyone.

And thus Luke 14 is challenging us to **LIVE** as people of humility and hospitality.

Dear God, please help us.