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Seat of Honor
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I love a great party!

My idea of what makes it a "great party" has changed over the years, but as a full-fledged extrovert, I truly enjoy the socializing, the mingling, the energy of the music and conversation....

I love a good party.

Now Jesus was invited to a dinner party at the home of a prominent Pharisee. Jesus may or may not have been a guest of honor and we are not even told if he knew anyone else there, but he was a people watcher. Jesus noticed when some paraded around acting superior and some appeared just to be happy to be invited. He noticed when someone assumed a seat of honor while others probably hadn't sat yet because they were not sure where they fit in.

So one question could be.... How do we in fact honor others?

The idea of a great party for me, brings weddings to mind. As the Officiant of the ceremony, I am cordially invited to the reception with my plus one. I've never been invited to be on the party bus, thank you God. So, Darin and I usually arrive earlier than others. If name cards are used, we often head to our spot ... near the kitchen.... Most often, there are no place cards. We arrive and instead, navigate towards the kitchen, away from the dance floor and the DJ's speakers. Both of us being ministers, and knowing this scripture passage, we steer clear of the head table. Oh how awkward to ask the pastor to move or worse yet, let her and her husband stay and throw off the bridal party balance. Jesus was aware of how people acted and reacted. He most likely found the few humble guest, mulling around, not sure where they were to fit in and noticed who was welcoming and who was vying for a higher position.

It is awkward when you do not know your place...

I can say from experience, that when you're given a place, honor feels really good. I officiated at your previous campus pastor's wedding and when we arrived at the reception, she said, "And you'll be sitting with family, because that is what you are." I was ushered to a seat next to the parents, it was just a seat but it was my seat. I was asked to sit here, I felt truly honored.

So, do we in fact, think about honoring others?

Friendships, I don't understand the psychology of them, but I know how they feel. Some are powerful for a short time. Some surprise you in the long run. You become family in a deeply devoted God kind of way.

I was recently honored by one of those surprises at a funeral.

Another party of sorts where really nobody knows where to sit. I had been her pastor 24 years ago and was delighted to officiate at her second marriage. You know United Methodists... We move.... And after I moved, we grew in friendship mostly because yearly we were counselors at our United Methodist Church Camps. Being counselors together, year after year, really does form a rather sisterly bond. Sadly, this spring her husband surprisingly died from a massive heart attack. Another counselor and I were stunned, as was she. The two of us just knew that we had to go to his funeral. We made the long drive, mostly in silence. We arrived. Everything was awkward. We went to find our seats before the back row filled up. "Oh no you don't" said

our friend as she hauled us into the family room. She said, "You and my daughter's family are the only family I've got here, the rest are his... you're sitting with me."
This was an extreme honor I had never expected to know and one I will never be able to repay.

So, is honoring others something we plan?

Jesus watched everyone at the gathering. He knew where the women were, he knew where the children were... not there! When I was growing up, Children were to be seen and not heard.

As a child, I was Seen! I Was Heard! And I was shushed!

Only by my parents oh yeah, and the choir ladies... I was raised by the village! But I was never shushed by the Pastor... I loved going into his office and seeing all the stuff on his walls. He had a lot of certificates and fancy looking things but his wall of honor were pictures that we kids had drawn during worship. He had them framed and they were up on his wall. The words stenciled on the wall above them read, "To such belongs the Kingdom of God." And yep... upper left corner was one of mine!

So, do we in fact, honor the little children?

Back to the story... What if you were the host of the dinner party? You were worried about seating and the discussions... You wanted to keep the peace at this dinner party. You knew the ones who would expect special places and fancy things And you know, sometimes it is just easier to go along with it rather than deal with the fallout. Maybe you wanted to sit next to this interesting man named Jesus, and even though you had issue with some of his teachings, you'd really like to bend his ear a little... but who else would be there and try to control the conversation, who else would be there demanding your attention so you couldn't enjoy his presence... ?

Who should sit with you at the head table?

Is it honor if you expect to sit in the honored section?

How do we in fact, honor them all? Then in all horrors of embarrassment, the Host was called out for the very thing that you were worried about. You elevated some and ignored others. You listen to Jesus through the whole admonishment. You are embraced that you are being called out for seeing some as better than others, seeing some as those who can repay the favor, inviting some for a business transaction.

You stay for all of it; to listen to everything he says even though you cannot believe this is happening. You allow Jesus to share your wrongs' publically. The Host could have denied, he could have argued and been defensive, but he stood there and took it! Most of us don't stand there and take it. We are ready to argue, get defensive and even leave in a huff, matters unsettled, leaving everyone around uncomfortable because they witnessed the conflict... still unsettled because there is no resolution.

In fact... there is no Honor.

To stay means taking on a humble persona. To really listen; to accept that there may have been a better way and that in fact, just maybe, you may have been wrong. But we need to stay, to listen, to accept that they may also be right, to work through the conflict and to find a resolution. The Host stayed, heard it all and then was able to humbly hear a final resolve in Jesus' teaching...

If you in fact, do honor others, "you will be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." A friend of mine was telling me of a time when someone stopped by the church and needed some assistance. He had really wanted to leave but he also had the means to provide the assistance. It took his time and some energy and looking back, he admitted that he may not have been the best that he could have been... But he had already worked a full day... it was time to go home.

When everything was taken care of and he was finally able to leave, she stopped him for one last thing.... Ugh! She didn't have much but she liked making trees out of wire. She sold them and had sold all of them but this one. She said, "This one must have been meant for you."

At this final sentence of his story telling, you heard a collective sigh from the rest of us, we knew the scripture. "She, from her poverty, has contributed all she had." This poor stranded woman had honored my friend with all that she had. Honor does not come because we demand it, it comes when we "humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord." When we see the worth in others and ask them to sit with us, at any table. So, I invite you to come and be at this table. Come as an honored guest, knowing that there is nothing that we can do to repay what the Lord offers. Come honored Guest!