

# God is Watching

**Luke 14:7-14**

**Preached by Dr. Cahill**

**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

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It's customary to wait for the honored guest to be seated at the best seat in the house while the other guests wait for their seating assignments. But if you jump the gun and try grabbing the best seat for yourself, you're setting yourself Jesus said your host will tell you, "Get up from there." Then in you'll be sent to the lowest place."

One of our parents' responsibilities was teaching us how to behave in public. Their even more challenging responsibility was teaching us how to behave in private.

Someone said, "Character is who you are when no one else is watching." Out in public, you're motivated to be at your best. But sometimes, you might forget others are watching when you grab the best seat for yourself.

Bad manners expose your true character.

Jesus went on to say, "When you have a dinner, don't invite your friends, brothers or relatives in case they invite you when return and you will 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. Instead you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:12-14)

Jesus seemed to be changing the subject. He went from teaching good manners to teaching an equally important lesson on hospitality.

After gaging the atmosphere in the room, Jesus could tell his host and the other guests were closely watching him, hoping he'd say or do something they could later use against him.

What they didn't realize was God was closely watching them. Hoping to trap Jesus, they ignored the mandate to be our brothers' keeper because anyone in need is our neighbor.

God watched them rubbing shoulders with people who looked, thought and behaved like them. God also watched them giving the cold shoulder to the crippled, the blind and the lame.

That's why God sent Jesus to them.

It's always hard but helpful when someone helps us see ourselves the way God sees us. We call these helpers prophets. God sends prophets to help us to face the truth about ourselves.

Last Sunday I referenced a scripture from the prophet Jeremiah, promising God already made a good plan for our future. If we cooperate with this plan everything will fall into place. When we don't, things go horribly wrong.

Case in point: After the Jews began their exile during the Babylonian captivity, they had to be wondering how they ended up in the mess they found themselves in. You can be sure they blamed everyone under the sun except themselves.

Sounding like an avenging prosecuting attorney, the Prophet Jeremiah made God's case against them.

Hear the word of the Lord:

I brought you into a beautiful land  
to eat its fruit and good things.

But when you entered  
you defile my land  
and made my heritage an  
abomination.

The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord?"

Those who handled the law  
did not know me.

They followed the prophets who  
chased after things that  
do not profit." (Jeremiah 2:7-8)

Did you know the conquering Babylonians didn't bring back the poor, cripple, the lame and the blind back to Babylon? They stayed behind in the Promised Land. Only the ruling classes, the religious leaders and the rich merchants, the ones who caused the calamity were dragged into captivity.

Jeremiah made the case they took advantage of God's grace and ignored God's warnings. Not wanting to hear it, the elites switched their allegiance to user-friendly gods giving them permission to pursue their path to self-destruction.

In the meantime, wanting the best seats at the table, the ruling class kept living lavishly and recklessly at the expense of the poor, the cripple, the lame and the blind.

Talk about rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Fast forward to 500 years later. Maybe the Pharisees never chased after false gods, but they did recreate God in their image.

Their God was strict, legalistic and judgmental, just like them. That's why Jesus called them, "white washed tombs." They could see themselves gleaming on the outside but God could see them dead on the inside.

It's easy for us to ask how intelligent, God fearing people could lack such a high degree self awareness.

The answer is troubling. Pharisees back then, like Presbyterians today were flawed human beings. (Remember, Pharisee and Presbyterian both begin with a "P.") No matter how hard we try our best, we have blind spots keeping us from seeing our worst.

These blind spots remain until God sends someone to help us see. All of us, even the smartest, most capable people in the world need outside help to see things straight.

Consider this. If Michael Phelps, the best swimmer in the world suddenly got cramps swimming out in the ocean, despite all his strength and skill, he couldn't save himself. He'd need a lifesaver.

So did the Pharisees. So do we.

We see the Pharisees as shallow and self righteous. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John reinforced that image through their stories about them letting Jesus get under their skin and bringing out the worst in them.

That's what Jesus does. He gets under our skin and brings out either our worst or our best.

Our best comes out when we're ready and willing to admit the error of our ways and repent. When you let this happen, your character gets redeemed and transformed.

But when Jesus gets under your skin and brings out your worst, you fight back to protect the way you are, leaving your character unredeemed and unreformed.

Let's get back to the Pharisee's dinner party. Jesus exhorted him to extend his hospitality beyond his family and friends.

Why? Being in sync with the Great Commandment, "Love God, love your neighbor and love yourself," the Pharisee's character would become more in sync with God's will, allowing his character to be transformed and made new. His transformation would make him think twice before grabbing the best seat for himself. Instead he'd be more inclined to make room for the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.

Whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper, none of us would dare grabbing the best seat at His table. That place is reserved for the One who said, "Whatsoever you do to the least of these, you also do it to me."

You don't have to look very far to find the least of these. You can see them now, in this sanctuary.

Being willing to lower yourself to raise up the members of your church family, graciously giving up what satisfies you for the sake of the other is what God is watching and waiting for you and me to do.

“The least of these” are also found beyond the four walls of this church. Christ lives in your coworker who needs your help to get the job done and the neighbor across the street who seems lost and confused. Christ lives in immigrants looking for opportunity but only finds uncertainty.

It’s people like these Jesus wants Pharisees and Presbyterians alike to include at the table.

But the list grows longer, including people spiritually and economically poor, people physically and spiritually blind, lame and crippled.

God wants us to get out there and invite these people into His house and join us at His table so we can remember Jesus together.

Christ is calling Babcock Presbyterian Church to a New Beginning. The old is finished and gone. A new day is dawning. The time has come for our vision statement, “Bringing Christ to people,” to be implemented with everything we’ve got.

Now is not the time to sit back and wait for others to do the bringing. Now is not the time to be concerned about who’s getting the best seats in the house.

Now is the time to search for and resubmit ourselves to God’s will and make room at the table for anyone who needs to be here as much as you and me.

God is watching. Don’t take that as a threat. Take it an opportunity for God to bring out our best so we can give back our best for the sake of the founder of this feast, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.