

MY PLACE

Jesus visited and shared meals with many different groups of people.
In the Luke passage, Jesus has been invited to a high ranking leader of the dominant religious group.
I can picture the scene: Jesus is a bit uncomfortable at this formal gathering of the elite; he likely doesn't have any friends there. After the polite greetings, Jesus is standing alone, off to the side, observing the eyes watching him and noting how and where people are taking their seats for the meal.

When the hosts comes to Jesus to show him where to sit, Jesus uses the opportunity to tell a parable to the host about one's proper place. It was a teachable moment.

I think being Christ-like includes taking the initiative to share insight when opportunities arise.

~~~~~  
Knowing expectations / knowing the rules of etiquette help us to feel at ease--comfortable.  
It's nice to know where to sit and what to do.  
We play games that put things in their proper place, such as jigsaw puzzles and solitaire.  
A pleasant home is where things "fit" us / where we can just BE.

~~~~~  
At family meals, when I was young, we all knew where to sit. That was normal. It was automatic, and the same was mostly true when riding in the car.
The parents always got the front seats.
I think I forgot to teach that decorum to my daughters. :)

Likewise, being out of place or not knowing how to behave is uncomfortable.

I recall my first formal meal--so many plates, cups and cutlery. Fortunately, the person next to me was kind enough to discreetly explain each and when to use it.

Starting a new job, going to a new school or visiting a different culture can make us feel uneasy, out of sorts.....out of place.

I find it a bit disquieting when I go to New York City; the rules / expectations are different there.
And, the reverse is true when someone from NYC comes here.
A New Yorker may be disturbed when strangers look at him/her.
In New York, one is not supposed to look into the eyes of another--so I've been told.
And in Belarus, accepting the aroma of strong body odor on crowded buses is a requirement to fitting in.
They have different expectations there..... and different hygiene standards, too.

~~~~~  
When we don't know where to sit, what to do or how to be, then we tend to feel uncomfortable, troubled and unsettled.  
It's like having shoes on the wrong foot or pieces of straw under the shirt.

Moreover, we don't appreciate it when others disrupt order and fairness. We are inclined to react negatively, resentfully when someone assumes a place that isn't theirs or takes our rightful place.

Injustice is an affront to all / to all things.

The other day, while driving into Saskatoon, I was part of the line that formed on Idylwyld Drive because a sign warned that the left lane was closed ahead.

As the line slowly progressed to the construction area, a pickup truck scooted by, and then pressed into the space between two cars at the front, just before there's only one lane.

His action was rude and disrespectful,... and it had a negative influence on others. He upset harmony in more than one way.

Some may resentfully concluded that if he can do that and benefit, then next time "I'll do the same."

I was prompted into being judgmental, thinking: "Well, he sure is arrogant and inconsiderate.

I don't know his motivation; however, the incident of grabbing a better place....served to reveal how such action disrupts harmony, social continuity and even peace.

Usurpers and bullies, of any kind, tear at the fibres of well being and unity.

Wholeness is broken,..... and destruction is part of that breakdown.

And, I think this also applies when some feel entitled to a better place / a loftier station in life than others, even if a culture allows / accepts the elitism.

In our society, privileged rank is not determined by noble blood lines. Instead, money buys an elevated position and preferential treatment and perks. The wealthy are treated better; they can hire better lawyers. They buy luxuries and perks.

They manipulate the media and the rules. They subjugate the rest of society.

And, even though the wealth filter is accepted, I think it is still detrimental to peace and wholeness,...because justice and equality are devalued or absent.

Is there really that much difference between the wealthy wielding power over the poor and a physically strong person intimating a weak person? There are bullies and victims in both cases.

~~~~~

Arrogance and haughtiness, of any type, is an affront to justice and destructive to the harmony of life with all things, including with God.

~~~~~

The Jeremiah clearly points out God's displeasure with those who are arrogant / with those who live as if they deserve to control their lot in life.

Arrogance: the assumption that one is entitled to more / to a place beyond justice and righteous is a type of greed, and it is delusional.

Greed and the delusion of superiority causes all sorts of destruction, including war, and.....it's hurtful to God's creation.

~~~~~

~~~~~

I once wrote to a politician that I was concerned about the rapid, unrestrained development.

He wrote back explaining that we needed to develop new ways of making more money in order to have the money to clean up the mess caused by development.

~~~This is a true story. I thought it pointless to write back.

~~~~

Too often, we humans over estimate ourselves. We think we will find a solution to correct the mistakes of our past thoughts.

That is poor logic. Plus it's arrogant, and it's also projecting ourselves into the role / the place of God.

Assuming God's seat / God's place hurts our relationship with God and all of creation suffers, too.

~~~~~

God's evaluation / God's judgment is a blow to human arrogance.

Jesus suggested that it is prudent to take a lesser chair / a lesser position, when it doubt.

It is obviously better to be invited to a rightful place, than to have your chair yanked out from under you.

Verse 11 is politely written in the passive voice. God is not referred to; however, any discerning reader would be wise to heed such a subtle, yet loaded message.

The words speak softly, yet with the force of a big stick.

"For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

~~~~~

Humility is not acting weak or diffident--being as a mouse.

Humility is being at peace with one's self / one's place.

So, verse 11, in different words:

Be in your place or you'll be put in your place.

~~~~~

Jesus isn't clear on who does the chair shuffling or how it happens to bring the arrogant down to "their" rightful place, but Jesus is precise about who facilitates the promoting / the lifting up.

We DO! We are called to participate in the restoration of balance / of justice..... by arranging for the exploited, the victimized to sit equally at God's banquet/ to live as partners in God's domain.

In those days, the poor, the maimed, lame and blind were at the bottom of society.

Fifty years ago, Martin Luther King Junior had a dream of black people living as equals with the whites.

Who needs to be lifted up today?

Who's missing? Who's mostly out of sight..... or mostly getting negative exposure?

???????

Verse 14 can be hard to understand. At first reading, it seems to say, "God is hiring you / rewarding you for the job of inviting "those" people to the banquet."

A better interpretation is ... Participating in justice draws us closer to God / to God's love as it also does for those being lifted up..... and those choosing to be in a humbler place.
The payment is wholeness / dwelling restored and redeemed in a just relationship.

~~~~~  
To be sure, this juggling to equality is not about Marxism.  
It's not about everyone having the same car or the same type of house or the same pay cheque.

Those are superficial, temporal measurements.

The right seat / being included is about how we regard and relate to ourselves, to others, all people and things,..... including God.

First Nations' thinking still cherishes living in harmony with creation.  
I think Western Christianity may have devalued / altered this vital aspect of living God's way--in our place / in harmony with creation.

In addition, arrogantly believing to be more powerful is just as harmful to wholeness as those who have been taught or berated into thinking they are less worthy.

Human depreciation removes / blocks participation in the wonder of God's creation experiment.

Poverty of the spirit forces a person to not fully engage and that withdrawal deprives all of us.

We need each other more than we may realize.

~~~~~  
This message is about being in our place and allowing others to be in their place.

This doesn't mean our children are given equal benefits and responsibilities. That is Not their place. They need more love and protection than that. They don't need such burdens and illusions.

This doesn't mean that the bishop's chair is for those of greater position, at least not anymore. If anything, "that" chair is a humbling seat..... because all eyes are on the one who sits there and much is expected, too.

~~~~~  
Your place / my place is not about title or wealth or the lack of both.

My place is where I need to be.

My place is where I fit in / where I am complete / where I'm whole.  
And, my place is hard to find when others are out of place and when God is Not with me.

My place is with you in your place, and with each person in his or her place,..... and with all of creation in whole and vibrant place, too.

~~~~~

God speaking through Jeremiah / through Jesus is trying to lead us to our place..... so that we will sense wholeness.....the love of God holding us all together.

The salvation process invites us to find our place --our true hearts' desire.

We can make all of this theology / all of life so complicated.....or we can simply trust Godthat through Christ.....we being lead to our place.

We can call it salvation. We can call it wholeness.....or we can call it Home.

Let's find our way home, together.