

## Gospel Tips for Summer Fun #3: Don't Worry About Status; Draw the Circle Wide

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Luke 14: 7-14

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Raise your hand if you watched the Royal Wedding or saw some of it. In case you missed it, Prince Harry of the British royal family married American Actress Meghan Markle on May 19th at St. George's cathedral. I don't follow the royals that closely, but since I am in the wedding business and have one person in the house who called it her super bowl, I did watch.

I was immediately fascinated by the insider-outsider dynamic at this wedding. Anyone else notice that?

The television commentators and royal wedding analysts said that St. George's was selected because it provided a more intimate setting than Westminster Abbey. This was true. The wedding at times felt very personal, even though it was essentially a state wedding. But St. George's cathedral itself created a very exclusive environment.

At St. George's there are two seating areas. There's a large outer chamber where most of the people were, then a wall (a rood screen) and then a small inner chamber with room for about 100 people. It was in the inner chamber where all the action happened, where the ceremony unfolded and the vows were exchanged. But those in the outer chamber couldn't see anything. Maybe they had closed circuit screens, but then they were really just watching it like the rest of us.

I, of course was very interested in the celebrities who were in and those who were out. Oprah: in. Tennis star Serena Williams: in. George Clooney and his wife Amal: in. Sir Elton John: out. James Corden: out. Soccer star David Beckham and his wife Victoria Beckham (Posh Spice): out.

I asked the Rev. Gayle Marsh, the Episcopal Priest at All Saints for an explanation on the cathedral and this inside outside dynamic. She wrote that St Edward III built St George's at Windsor in 1348. The inner chamber is a choir stall for the students that sing the liturgy at morning and evening prayer.

The "rood screen" dividing the cathedral is part of high Gothic style which St George's is. The nave (outer chamber) is the main area now with pews. For centuries ordinary churches used the nave space like a farmers market with animals, bankers etc conducting trade. I wrote: It's interesting to me to think of that history colliding with

this particular royal wedding in 2018. Celebrities sitting where the farmer's market used to be is an amusing thought. She relied, "Not just a farmers market - animals and poo too.

In a very visible way, at this royal wedding, there were some very famous people who were humbled - who I'm guessing weren't sitting where they wanted to be.

Jesus lived in a time where it mattered where you sat and with whom you were eating at weddings and banquets. These were important social ceremonies. Status was a big deal, and human beings haven't changed. Status still matters to us.

In our story for today, Jesus has been invited to the house of a Pharisee to eat a meal on the sabbath. When Jesus arrives, he notices how everyone is jostling for position and social standing.

Apparently, no one told Jesus that it isn't good form to criticize the party to which you've been invited, so Jesus speaks up and says, "when you go to a party, don't fight for the chair of honor, sit in the lowest place. Maybe you'll get bumped up. I'll save you a little bit of embarrassment. You'll thank me later," Jesus says.

Then Jesus offers this key teaching of the Realm of God. It's the same teaching Mary sings in the Magnificat at the beginning of Luke, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Jesus tells us not to worry about status because we already have it. We are already children of God. We are already loved by God. If we truly trust this, it changes how we interact with one another. It changes what we need.

Biblical Scholar R. Alan Culpepper in commenting on this passage says, "humility is a quality of life open to persons who know that their worth is not measured by recognition from their peers, but by the certainty that God has accepted them."

Jesus then turns from criticizing the guests to criticizing the host. He wants to make sure the contrast of the Realm of God, the world that he is creating is made clear. "When you throw a party, don't invite your friends and family, those who are wealthiest, who have the most status. Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind." This is Mary's Magnificat from the beginning of Luke, the powerful brought low and the low lifted up, valuing those who aren't valued, making sure there is enough for everyone and that everyone is included.

Gospel Tip for Summer fun #3 is: Don't worry about status, draw the circle wide. Gospel Tip for Summer fun #1 is: In the storm place your trust in love. #2 is: keep your eyes open on the road for you never know when you will meet the holy. #3 is: Don't worry about status, draw the circle wide.

Back to the Royal Wedding. In the middle came this amazing sermon by the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, the Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal church, who happens to be African American. Bishop Curry, in his own way was casting the vision of the Realm of God, the same vision that Jesus is teaching in our stories for today. It was remarkable that in that setting, among some of the wealthiest people in the world, this preacher spoke not just about romantic love that holds two people together, but about how romantic love is part of a greater love that is the foundation of the Realm of God, a different vision for life together. It's like this Bishop knew the whole world was watching, and he didn't want to miss his chance to teach. Some of the royals might not have thought he was the best guest both in style and substance. The cameras caught them stealing glances at one another.

The first sentence of his sermon quoted Martin Luther King Jr. "We must discover the redemptive power of love. And when we do that we will make of this old world, a new world. Love is the only way." In these first sentences he brought the legacy of slavery in the United States and colonialism and racial discrimination past and present into the room, at the royal wedding.

He talked about romantic love for a bit but quickly turned the sermon to a something much bigger. He spoke of the great commandment, love God and love neighbor. He was very animated here and the royals were a little fidgety. He brought up the spiritual, the slave song There is a Balm in Gilead. He mentioned that this hymn speaks of love's redemptive power. This love of Jesus, this love in our midst sacrifices itself for others, it gives itself for others and that's what is so powerful.

Then he said, "Imagine this tired old world when love is the way, unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive." Imagine our families, our neighborhoods, our governments, our businesses and commerce. When love is the way, poverty will become history, our earth will be a sanctuary, we will lay down our swords and shields." When love is the way, we will treat each other like we are actually family."

I thought this was bold. He spoke of poverty among some of the wealthiest people in the world, laying down swords and shields among those in military uniform, and treating one another like family when the royal family was becoming a multiracial family in front of the whole world. He spoke of sacrifice in the midst of people who have so much. This was a Christ-like moment. It was powerful.

And it was true to the vision of the Realm of God. Rooted in a love that accepts us and loves us all, and turns us towards giving ourselves to one another, even sacrificing something for another.

Which leads us back to our gospel tip for summer fun #3: Don't worry about status and draw the circle wide. Where in our lives are we worried about status? Can we let go of that? Where can we let go of that? Can we trust that we are accepted already by a love that is greater than all of us? What changes then? What does our life look like and our world look like then?

And, where should we draw the circle a little wider? Where might we include a few more people in the inner chamber or break down the "Rood Screen" that separates the inner chamber from the outer chamber. What would it look like to stretch that circle? Would something redemptive happen this summer, something that changes us, something that changes our neighborhood?

Maybe so. Don't worry about status, draw the circle wide. Then we step back and see what love can do. Amen.