

The Boston Red Sox

- The 86 year championship drought:
- The Curse of the Bambino and the banner.
- Whether it's sport or business or romance
- We don't enter into the competition to come second,
- And there can be serious consequences for competing poorly.
- The problem: there's only one top spot
- And we can be tempted to think
- That we must do whatever it takes
- Think cricket, South Africa, and sand paper.
- More than this, even if we do win
- *The glory fades*: and big questions can remain
- What is life anyhow? What's the point of existence?

Wherever you go in the world or in history

- We encounter this problem.
- One solution: to detach ourselves from the desire for glory.
- This seems to be part of the power and attraction
- Of Buddhist teaching, or of stoicism.
- But another way forward is open to us:
- *Letting God fulfil this desire for glory in our lives.*
- Today I'm proclaiming good news:
- We do not have to grasp after glory in the human community
- As if we can justify our existence by how much we earn,
- Or how good we look, or how successful our relationships are,
- Rather, we are free to place our trust in Christ,
- Who took the last place of all on the cross,
- But whom God exalted to his right hand,
- So that, with Christ, we may share in real glory
- That does not fade or pass away.

Here's how our reading begins:

- **On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath...**
- Going to someone's home for a meal:
- This is a very human reality,

- And Jesus' looks at this human reality with a psychologist's eye:
- **When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour...**
- When he noticed how even the seating at the dinner table
- Became a political battleground, of jostling for honour...
- **When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable.**
- A parable: there is going to be something in what Jesus says
- That goes beyond the literal meaning,
- That discloses to us what the kingdom of God is like,
- That reveals to us who Jesus is.

Jesus says: **'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, 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 honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.**

- Literally, then there will be *glory* to you in the presence of all...
- It's easy and right to take this parable as literal advice
- For what we should in like situations...
- If you take it this way, it will be useful: on example...
- But something else is going on: Did you notice the setting of the parable?
- A wedding banquet: this makes us think of that Great Feast
- The celebration of the marriage of Christ and his bride,
- And certainly Jesus' hearers headed in this direction
- When directly after they receive Jesus' teaching one of them says,
- **'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God!'**

And, in fact, Jesus summarises his parable with these words:

- **For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'**
- That is, *God* will humble them; *God* will exalt them.
- Jesus will repeat these words
- In the Parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee
- Do you remember what happens there?
- The Tax Collector humbles himself before God

- And is exalted as he goes down from the temple
- Justified, right with God.
- So we do well when we seek glory
- Not from the human community, but from God,
- And as we let God raise us up as his justified people.
- We'll come back to this.

But first let's hear how our reading ends.

- **[Jesus] 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 or your relatives or rich neighbours, 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,**
- Did you notice that Jesus is now speaking to the host?
- We can jostle for honour in how we attend a banquet,
- And we can also jostle for honour in inviting guests.
- Especially if we invite people in terms of worldly glory:
- In terms of who will invite us in return.
- Jesus' teaching, as we receive it and act on it,
- Frees us from seeking a glory that will quickly pass away.
- More than this, Jesus promises us the honour
- Of having God in our debt; he says:
- **for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'**
- For *God* will repay you.
- Jesus here is echoing the Old Testament where we read:
- **Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full.** Proverbs 19:17
- Imagine that Elon Musk had a debt to pay back to you...
- Welcome those who cannot repay you, Jesus is saying,
- And *God* will be in your debt,
- You will have glory given to you *by God*.

This is all good, sound, reliable spiritual advice

- Given to us by our Lord Jesus.
- But if we listen only to *what* he says
- Without considering *who* says is
- Then we will miss out on the heart of what Jesus has to say to us.

- This is because Jesus is not simply telling us how to act
- If we want our human need for glory fully satisfied,
- He is also revealing to us *who he is*:
- He is the one who has taken the last place,
- And who has been exalted to the right hand of the Father.

In Philippians 2 we read these words:

- **Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— *even death on a cross.***
- The cross: this is the lowest place, the least desirable,
- The most shameful.

But remember what Jesus says: **all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**

- And how does the reading from Philippians go on?
- **Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the *glory* of God the Father.**

Dear people of God,

- You who have been baptised into Christ:
- In your baptism into Christ you have shared in his shameful death:
- You have taken the lowest place with him.
- Now that he has been exalted
- *You share in the glory that is his.*
- We together have the approval, the honour of God,
- So that we do not need to exalt ourselves in this world,
- But are free to serve one another in love,
- And to find our peace in God's will for us,
- In the places he has put us in life,
- In the callings that he has given us,
- Knowing that in the kingdom of God
- The greatest is the one who serves,
- Even Jesus Christ himself. In his name. Amen.