

## “Reserved Seating”

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Josh. 3:7-17

Matt. 23:1-12

“The greatest among you will be your servant.

All who exalt themselves will be humbled,  
and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Mt. 23:11-12

Let us pray... O God,

Bless us with the confidence that no matter where we find ourselves in life,  
we are where we are needed to be.

Amen

In Germany, a ‘gasthaus’ is like a small restaurant or diner –  
literally a ‘guest-house’ where you can get something good to eat,  
like schnitzel Holstein, or bratwurst mit kartolfen,  
and something to drink like eine glasse bier or eine tasse kaffee.

In a village, such a place would not be very big,  
but there would always be one table that would have a sign that said,  
‘Reseviert’, which means ‘reserved’;  
And that was for the local people when they came in to dine –  
such that in the midst of being a business as an eating establishment,  
there was room for hospitality to the local community, too.

It’s a good tradition kind of like the theme song of the TV show ‘Cheers’  
about a downtown bar in Boston ‘where everybody knows your name’.  
And I imagine there are places here in The Villages where you may like to go  
for a morning cup of coffee and to read the paper and socialize with friends  
and where the waitress or host knows you as a regular  
and you have your own special seat – you know, kind of like church!

Did we touch a nerve there?

Is there such a thing as having your own seat in church?  
That was a big deal in some early churches in New England  
where the pews would be divided in sections with little doors  
that would have a family’s name on it!

Apparently, this was a function of how much someone gave to their church –  
Oh, well! Not an option here.

It’s nice to know you have a place that is yours where you are expected.  
And church should be a place where there is room enough  
to sit down and feel welcome.

Willard, p.2

Isn't our tendency as people to want to have a decent seat  
if not the best seat in the house,  
but that generally humility prevails as we make room for one another.  
In another version of Jesus' teaching about those who exalt themselves  
and those who humble themselves which is found in Luke 14,  
he recommends taking a lower seat at a social gathering  
rather than one up front and risk being bumped to the rear  
when a bigger celebrity shows up.

That's like the old commercials with retired baseball player, Bob Uecker,  
who is ushered out of the wrong seat at a stadium  
and he says, 'I must be up in the front row',  
but he winds up in the 'nosebleed section'.  
Instead, Jesus suggests we take the humbler position in the hope  
that when the hostess shows up she will invite you up to place of honor.

You would think that everybody deserves their 'place under the sun' –  
though it doesn't seem to be generally recognized as a universal right.  
Intaead that is something that has been worked out in human history  
through war and establishing a system of land ownership.

The Hebrew people who left oppression in Egypt  
wandered for 40 years in the wilderness until that first generation  
passed away and a new generation of people  
called Israelites returned to claim their "Promised Land"  
as the spiritual descendants of Jacob who was called Israel.

And they would organize themselves as twelve tribes represented  
by the names of Jacob's twelve sons.

They had to fight their way into that new land  
and the dramatic beginning of that conquest was  
in the parting of the waters of the River Jordan  
just as the waters of the Red Sea had been parted  
at the beginning of their journey.

By the way, these stories are images of baptism –  
in which people are carried through the midst of dangerous waters  
to receive an identity as part of a community  
and having a shared purpose of creating a community.

Of course much of the history of the Church which includes its Jewish roots  
is about being a Christian community here on earth.

But our faith also deals with the time to come  
and wouldn't it be nice to know that we had a place reserved  
in paradise – a seat in the choir, so to speak.

Willard, p.3

A dear friend of mine who is a conservative, fundamentalist Baptist  
with a big heart and who taught me to pray aloud,  
"Do you know you are going to heaven?"  
A question like that makes you think...

*After a long illness, a woman died and arrived at the Gates of Heaven.  
While she was waiting for Saint Peter to greet her,  
she peeked through the Gates.*

*She saw a beautiful banquet table.*

*Sitting all around were her parents and all the other people  
she had loved and who had died before her.*

*They saw her and began calling greetings to her –*

*"Hello" "How are you! We've been waiting for you!"*

*"Good to see you."*

*When Saint Peter came by, the woman said to him,*

*"This is such a wonderful place! How do I get in?"*

*"You have to spell a word," Saint Peter told her.*

*"Which word?", the woman asked.*

*"Love."*

*The woman correctly spelled "Love"*

*and Saint Peter welcomed her into Heaven.*

*About two years later, Saint Peter came to the woman*

*and asked her to watch the Gates of Heaven for him that day.*

*While the woman was guarding the Gates of Heaven,  
her husband arrived.*

*"I'm surprised to see you," the woman said.*

*"How have you been?"*

*"Oh, I've been doing pretty well since you died," her husband told her.*

*"I married the beautiful young nurse who took care of you  
while you were ill. And then I won the lottery.*

*I sold the little house you and I lived in and bought a big mansion.*

*My wife and I traveled all around the world.*

*We were on vacation and I went water skiing today.*

*I fell, the ski hit my head, and here I am. How do I get in?"*

*"You have to spell a word," the woman told him.*

*"Which word?", her husband asked.*

*"Czechoslovakia."*

<http://www.makeitclearnow.org/re humor.html>

Willard, p.4

That joke gives new meaning to what the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2,

‘For by grace are ye saved through faith...

Not of works, lest any [one] should boast.

such that it is also true that it is

“not of words, lest anyone should boast.”

What is our guarantee for entry into heaven?

Is there a way to reserve a seat in that heavenly choir?

The Bible says very little about what heaven is like

except through the imagery of Jesus’ parables.

We are told by Christian tradition that it is by the saving action

of Jesus Christ dying on the cross and that by believing this

our sins are forgiven and so, we may enter into heaven.

But maybe that means to love like Jesus loved –

giving of yourself as he gave of himself for the sake of others.

Giving – in this way, means to really believe that the love of God

can make a difference.

And so we find ourselves forgiven and already in heaven.

Are you going to heaven?

Why not just say ‘yes’, and reserve yourself a seat by loving others

as God has loved you.

Amen

Joshua 3:7-17 (NRSV)

7 The Lord said to Joshua,

‘This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel,  
so that they may know that I will be with you  
as I was with Moses.

8 You are the one who shall command the priests  
who bear the ark of the covenant,

“When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan,  
you shall stand still in the Jordan.” ’

9 Joshua then said to the Israelites,

‘Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God.’

10 Joshua said,

‘By this you shall know that among you is the living God  
who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites,  
Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites,  
and Jebusites:

11 the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth  
is going to pass before you into the Jordan.

12 So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel,  
one from each tribe.

13 When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord,  
the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan,  
the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off;  
they shall stand in a single heap.’

14 When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan,  
the priests bearing the ark of the covenant  
were in front of the people.

15 Now the Jordan overflows all its banks  
throughout the time of harvest.

So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan,  
and the feet of the priests bearing the ark  
were dipped in the edge of the water,

16 the waters flowing from above stood still,  
rising up in a single heap far off at Adam,  
the city that is beside Zarethan,

while those flowing towards the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea,  
were wholly cut off.

Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

17 While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground,  
the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord  
stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan,  
until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

Matt. 23:1-12

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

2 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;

3 therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it;

but do not do as they do,

for they do not practise what they teach.

4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear,

and lay them on the shoulders of others;

but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger

to move them.

5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others;

for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

6 They love to have the place of honour at banquets

and the best seats in the synagogues,

7 and to be greeted with respect in the market-places,

and to have people call them rabbi.

8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher,

and you are all students.

9 And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—

the one in heaven.

10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor,

the Messiah.

11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled,

and all who humble themselves will be exalted.