

“Life’s Best Place”

“... Then he took him and healed him and sent him away” (Luke 14:4b).

It’s always ideal when the best things in life match our favorite things in life. However, I think many of us know from experience that one of the more challenging lessons we face in this life is when these things don’t match. Those times when the things that are truly best for us aren’t really our favorite things to do can be quite difficult.

A simple but common example is with food and drink. When our favorite foods and drinks in this life really aren’t always the best for us. Another good example is with time. When our favorite use of time (e.g. doing nothing, gaming, bingeing some form of media, doing our favorite hobby, etc.) might not be the best use of our time in a given moment. Or perhaps we recognize this tension with our favorite actions. We like to talk, but what’s best for the situation and people involved is silence. And sometimes the exact opposite is true, where silence is our favorite, but the best thing in that moment is to talk.

These examples set the stage for us to recognize a pattern that pops up frequently in our lives – our favorite things in life and the best things for us in life can often be at odds. And this weekend’s readings reveal to us a much deeper level to this tension as we consider our relationship with God. Our Gospel reading especially opens our minds, hearts and by God’s grace, our whole lives, to where life’s best place really is even in the midst of where our favorite places in life might actually be.

Throughout our lives, we might say that we’re searching for life’s best place. While each of us may define this spot differently, I think there are three big things that often overlap. It’s tempting for all of us to think that life’s best place is where we have the most cash, the most control and the most comfort. Many times, we may have to settle for just one of those three, but that doesn’t stop us from continuing to look for that ideal spot where all three things are met. Yet, the truth is that those criteria more likely lead to our favorite place in life and not as often to the place that is truly best for us in this life.

Our Gospel reading deals with finding life’s best place and shows us two different angles to this search. The first and clearer angle is with the lawyers and Pharisees present at the dinner. They were the ones at this meal with the most cash, most control and most comfort and they were targeting the seats that most highlighted this honor. For them their favorite seat and the best seat were the same thing, and they believed they deserved to make this known. Jesus observed this entitlement and pride and called it to account with His parable.

The second angle and perhaps not as clear is with the unusual guest who has dropsy. This man was out place. He was suffering from swelling in his body. And in that time when the understanding of medical issues was far less advanced this swelling could be considered a punishment for immoral behavior. So, this man’s swelling likely made a statement more about his character than it did about his body just not functioning properly. Yet here he is at a meal with individuals who would have been considered the most moral and upstanding of that day.

Did he show up because he knew that this meal with all these distinguished people was the best place he could find? Perhaps in desperation, this man felt that they had the cash, control and comfort, maybe some of that could be shared with him? Was he there because the Pharisees wanted to use him as a trap for Jesus and he was desperate enough to go along with their plan? This seems quite likely, especially as Luke mentions their close observation of Jesus’ actions on that Sabbath.

Yet what shouldn’t be ignored with this desperate man’s search for life’s best place is that this is where God wanted him to be. This man wasn’t there to be a tool in the religious leaders’ plot

as it looked initially. Neither was he there because the company of lawyers and Pharisees was life's best place as that man and most of his community probably thought. No, he was there because Jesus, God in the flesh, was going to be there. And wherever Jesus is, that truly is the best place in life.

What emphasizes this truth even more is what Jesus does for this man. Jesus heals the man from his swelling and then He sends him away from the dinner. There's no doubt that this healing points to Jesus as life's best place, but the sending away of this man proclaims this too. Moving this man on from the dinner of these distinguished guests makes a clear statement that life's best place wasn't a seat of honor at the ruler of the Pharisees' house nor was it just being present as a tool for a trap. Life's best place was with Jesus and now that Jesus had found him, he didn't need to linger at this dinner any longer.

Which angle most relates to your life right now? Have you settled in on something that feels like life's best place for you where you're satisfied by your cash, control and comfort? Do find yourself believing that you deserve to have your favorite things in this life also be the best things for your life even if God says otherwise? Are you willing to use others to protect what you determine to be your life's best place?

Or has your search for life's best place become more desperate? Have your ongoing health challenges led you to believe you're being punished for specific, sinful behavior? Are you seeking connection with whomever and whatever you can find that might satisfy the need for things like cash, control and comfort? Have you found yourself willing to be used by others convincing yourself that that's a better place in life to be than where you've been?

If you find these questions hard to hear, please know that you're not alone. I certainly stand convicted by both angles. Whether you're struggling with the deserving side of things or the desperate side of things, neither is truly remedied by seeing life's best place as where we have the most cash, most control or most comfort. Those three things and many others that could also be included come and go and are never satisfied. We need life's best place to be something, somewhere, someone, who is the same yesterday and today and forever. We need life's best place to be Jesus.

And this weekend, Jesus finds us and delivers to us life's best place. He has brought us here to this sacred space to deliver Himself to us. He humbled Himself, taking on human flesh, to meet us where we are. He lived, died and rose for us to win for us the best things for us, forgiveness of sins, a restored relationship with Him and life eternal. Now, He is preparing to bring us and all who trust in Him to heaven where at last the tension will be removed and the best things for us will truly be our favorite things.

As we wait for this day to come, the Lord is already leading and guiding us to see the best things He has for us as our favorite things even now. He is changing our hearts and minds to not look only after our own interests but also the interests of those around, especially here in the Church. He is distancing our dependence on cash, control and comfort and replacing it with firmer trust in Him. He is sending our desperation away with His peace that surpasses all human understanding. He is helping us learn that He is our best place in life and is worth being our favorite place too. **"For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come."** (*Hebrew 13:14*) Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan