

# Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

By Ken Woodley

If we're being honest with ourselves, I think we'd all admit to wanting a place of honor.

We want to be valued and seen to be valued. That's human nature.

But perhaps sitting at the head of the table isn't really the place of honor that it's cracked up to be. And maybe we misunderstand what true "honor" really means.

Remember the story in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus is having a meal at the house of a leader of the Pharisees. He notices all the guests trying to slip into a place of honor and so he tells a parable to rearrange their perspective. When you go to a wedding, he says, don't take a place of honor. Somebody more deserving than you might come in next and the host would have to ask you, in front of everyone, to move.

That would ruin the occasion for you. No matter how tasty the food, you'd be sitting there feeling humiliated, rather than like a "big shot."

Take the lowest seat in the pecking order, Jesus continues, and then your host might ask you to move up to a place of honor.

Those who exalt themselves, he points out, will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

That theme continues the melody of The Beatitudes from The Sermon on the Mount. The meek shall inherit the earth. A humble spirit is important to Jesus. The first shall be last and the last shall be first, he tells us elsewhere in the Gospels.

And with good reason.

For one thing, those worried about getting the place of honor are thinking only of themselves and their own prestige. There isn't room in their mind, and so their heart, for anyone else.

They would collect all the loaves and fishes and keep them for themselves, believing their hunger is greater than any of the other 5,000 people. And so they would miss their moment with Jesus and a chance to help bring a miracle into the world.

The kingdom of heaven is not near to such people. It's miles and miles and lives away from them, a tiny speck on the horizon that they convince themselves is just a distant crow against a cloud.

They wouldn't recognize the kingdom of heaven if it were to be served to them in a bun with mustard and catsup.

The happiness they feel, therefore, when they grab a place of honor is counterfeit. They exile themselves from the true currency of God's love and grace and bankrupt the world around them rather than enriching it.

They miss the chance to change the life of the person standing right beside them. They miss, therefore, the greatest gift and honor of all.

But, if I am being truly honest, there have been moments when I have missed out, as well. There have been times in my life when I desperately wanted a place of honor, something to help me feel good about myself, an affirmation to fill places of emptiness that sometimes felt like holes.

And sometimes still do.

At those times, I lose sight of that greatest gift of all, like a child turning his back on the Christmas tree.

Only when I consciously step away from such thoughts and reach out for the hand of Jesus do I feel filled.

Filled to the brim.

And to overflowing.

Happily sitting in the very last seat of all, furthest away from the head of the table but closest to the love of God, and those who really need me.