

Thought for the day 25th June 2022 from Robin Fishwick (All Hallows)

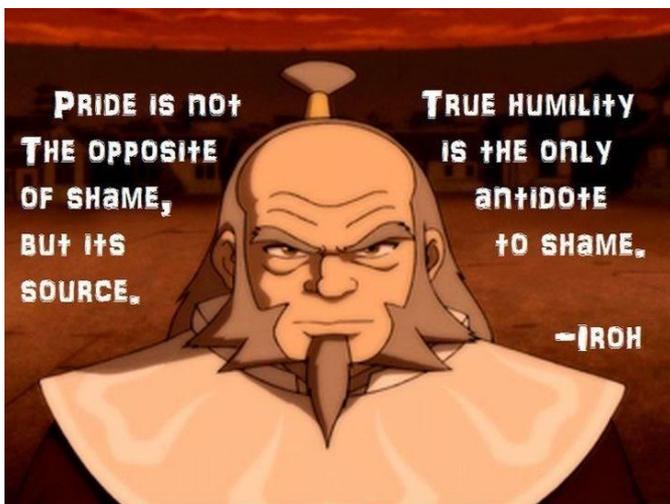
Luke 14:1-11

Humility and Humiliation

Today's New Testament reading is not just a guide to etiquette. It does actually work as a guide to etiquette - don't risk embarrassment by taking a place of honour you might be asked to leave - but it does have deeper implications than that, encapsulated in the final proverb "Everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up".

This teaching arises from Jesus' observation of people who are self important, who feel they are better than the common people, people who think that the best things in life are theirs by right. Again and again his teachings are urging his followers not to be impressed by the proud, the pompous, the arrogant or the powerful, but rather to seek inspiration from the humble. Jesus is repeatedly unimpressed by the impressive; by Herod, by the buildings of Jerusalem, by Pontius Pilate, and least of all by the religious leaders. The heroes of his stories and observations are often the humble, the poor, the outsiders, those whom people wouldn't normally look twice at. Nobodies.

What a terrible place to be, when you are so engrossed in a privileged bubble that those outside are seen as "nobodies", as not even being. That's one way of understanding what Jesus means by "raca" (Mt 5:22). The current "Black Lives Matter" campaign is one expression of those outside a bubble of privilege crying out to be noticed by those inside, for their experiences to be heard. But the bubble is also a prison for those inside, and the way out of the prison is humility. Here's a piece of wisdom from Uncle Iroh. If you don't know who Uncle Iroh is, ask a teenage friend:



Humility is an easier thing to embrace than it appears to be - once you embrace it. Before you embrace humility, you live in fear that you might be humbled - and that the experience of being humbled will be the end of you. The fear of losing face is a terrible thing for those whose existence is bound up with outward appearances. Whenever you do get to embrace humility, you find yourself free to frolic in the great world outside the bubble. As the beatitudes tell us, that great world outside belongs to the humble, rather than the entitled.

So Jesus and Uncle Iroh tell us this counter-intuitive truth. If you want to avoid humiliation, embrace humility. Then, when the wind blows your hat off and you have to bend over and pick it up out of a puddle, you cannot be hurt by laughter, because you were the one who laughed first.

Robin Fishwick