

# Arts & Faith

Art and Commentary for Pentecost +12, Proper 17C by [Hovak Najarian](#)

## Introduction

Greetings to everyone associated with St. Margaret's Sunday Morning Forum,

The Gospel for Sunday, August 28, 2022 is [Luke 14:1,7-14](#). This passage calls attention to the behavior of dinner guests at the home of a leader of the Pharisees. Jesus also was a guest and when he saw how people were behaving, it was time for a parable.

This week, I am sharing passages from a commentary titled "[The politics of the Table—Luke 14:1:7-14](#)" by English writer and lecturer, Alastair Roberts.

The Painting is by [James J. Tissot](#).

~Hovak Najarian

*Alastair J. Roberts (PhD, Durham University) is one of the participants in the Mere Fidelity podcast and a fellow of Scripture and theology with the Greystone Theological Institute.*

---



*The Meal in the House of the Pharisee, gouache on paper, 1886-94, James J. Tissot, 1836-1902*  
*Selected passages from a commentary by Alastair Roberts.*

**The occasion:** When Jesus was invited to dine at the home of a Pharisee leader, he noticed that guests chose the places of honor. This was a time for a parable.

**The Parable:** “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, 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 honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” ([Luke 14: 1, 7-14](#))

In reference to this passage from Luke, Alastair Roberts noted that “Jesus teaching echoes Proverbs 25:6-7, ‘Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told ‘Come up here’ than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.’” Roberts pointed out that in Jewish society of the first century, “dinner guests pressed for the best seats and hosts invited the sort of people from whom they could hope for repayment or improved social status.”

[*Editor's comment:* We are all familiar with situations in which a person's words or actions are designed to bring about a return favor or monetary gain. A person's true character, however, is revealed by other actions. The following quote (with variations of its wording) has been attributed to several people but Malcolm Forbes seems to have been the first to observe: "You can clearly judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him."  
*H.N.*]

Roberts writes: "The table manners that Jesus called for involve the rejection of the sort of honor culture practiced in many first century Mediterranean societies. Instead of grasping for honor, Jesus followers should be characterized by humility and self-effacement. While seating arrangements and dinner invitations were means for social climbers to accrue honor and status in their society, Jesus challenges his disciples to reject the way of honor seekers and ...to seek the praise of God over that of man."

Roberts concludes with the following:

"A communal meal remains a central feature of the Church's worship in the Eucharist. Politics and the manners and social relations that correspond to them are first learnt at the table. It is at the Eucharist that we begin to learn the manners and politics of the kingdom, where we are trained to act as cultivated members of the court of the King. It is at the Eucharist that we can learn to put others before ourselves, to extend God's goodness to those without the power to repay, to live as a thankful people, and to release people from their debts to us. As these new manners and politics become second nature to us, they should extend out to and be confirmed in all areas of our lives and practice."

*Alastair Roberts is an Anglican Writer and Lecturer.*

[When French artist James J. Tissot became older, he took a deep interest in his faith and the people of the Bible. The Bible became his primary source of subject matter. Tissot first focused on the life of Christ and then in his later years, he painted subjects from the Old Testament.]

Passages from Alastair Roberts' commentary were selected by Hovak Najarian. Hovak Najarian © 2022