

The Price is Right
[Luke 14:1-14,](#)
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When I was a kid, the best part of staying home sick from school was getting to watch a game show called The Price is Right. It was a lot of fun to watch – there were lots of flashing lights, cool sound effects and everyone was really excited to be there – but to be honest, when you're a kid, the show itself doesn't really make a lot of sense. To win on the Price is Right, you need to be really good at knowing exactly how much things are worth – Bob Barker would bring something out on stage, and everyone would guess how much that thing cost, the exact dollar value, and for a kid with no money and no real shopping experience, that is pretty difficult. They'd pull out a set of dining room furniture or some luggage, and I'd guess that's worth, what, like \$50 bucks? And then the actual retail value would turn out to be several thousand dollars, and I would be stunned. Who would pay that much money for furniture? That's insane. And then you have to account for the US exchange rate, and inflation, and nowadays all the tariffs changing daily, and pretty soon the whole thing gets way too complicated way too quickly – better to just hope they bring out the Giant Plinko Board, because at least that is easy to understand. To win at The Price is Right, you have to know what everything is worth. You have to be able to tell at a glance what is valuable, and what is worthless.

And doing that with handbags and station wagons is one thing, but in our Gospel reading this morning from the book of Luke, we see that this isn't just limited to stuff. Jesus is invited to a dinner party, and when he arrives he notices that all the guests are all playing their own little version of the Price is Right. Each person arriving at the party is trying to look around at all the other guests and figure out where they fit in, in terms of their relative importance and social standing compared with all the other guests. In Jesus' day, your social standing was very important – society was strictly divided along lines of class and wealth and power, and where you sat at a party like this was a clear indication to you and to the world around you of just how much you were worth, how important you were in the eyes of your community. This meant that every social gathering was an opportunity to climb a little bit higher up the ladder, make some connections with your social superiors to prove to them that you belong. Your status, your value, they're all determined by what everyone around you thinks about you, which means that as soon as you arrive at this party, you have to play the Price is Right. You have to look around the room and decide exactly where everyone else ranks on the social ladder and where you fit in, you have to be able to tell at a glance who was valuable, and who was worthless.

And some of these decisions could be pretty difficult to figure out – deciding whether the town doctor was more prestigious than the town lawyer, which synagogue leader is the up-and-coming star and which one

is going nowhere – but some decisions were easy. Even if you didn't know exactly where everybody ranked, it would've been very clear who was at the top, and who was at the bottom. A disabled man with swollen limbs, for example, was not someone you needed to care about, not someone worth noticing or bothering with. In that world, people believed that if you were sick or disabled or broken in some way, it must be your own fault somehow – it was God's judgment, punishment for some secret sin committed by you or your parents or one of your ancestors. A man like that is not someone anyone would waste their attention on; on the Price is Right ranking board, he's at the bottom. He's worthless. And at the other end of the scale, at the top of the social ladder, well, there's this hot-shot new preacher/teacher/miracle worker who's got everybody talking. He's been healing the sick and feeding the hungry and even raising the dead all over Galilee and Judea. That's the kind of guy you want to be seen with – he's a rising star, and you would expect that guy to be sitting right at the top of the heap, alongside all the other local celebrities, the who's who of important figures in the community at the head table. That's what you would expect to happen at this dinner party. But that's not what happens. When Jesus arrives at this party, instead of heading for the places of power and influence and prestige, he does the opposite. He enters the room, and he finds the one man there who doesn't belong – the man at the very bottom, the unloved, unwanted outcast, that's where Jesus chooses to be. And as if that wasn't enough, he calls the

whole room to attention, all these strivers and schmoozers and social climbers, and in front of the entire gathering, he throws down a challenge. It's a challenge to his host and to all the other synagogue leaders, all the most important, influential people who everyone else is trying desperately to sit with and impress, instead, Jesus insults them. He challenges their interpretation of the scriptures, and then he breaks the law right there in front of them by healing this disabled man on the Sabbath. This social event is supposed to be an opportunity to win friends and influence people, to climb the social ladder, and instead Jesus takes a swan dive off the top rung, he torpedoed his reputation in the community in front of everyone else. Jesus refuses to play the Price is Right the way everyone else is playing – he treats the people at the bottom as if they're precious, as if they're valuable, worth healing, worth loving, worth sacrificing his own place at the party for, and he acts like everything else is worthless.

So when Jesus gives these partygoers his advice about how they should play the game they're all playing, about where to sit when they arrive – “don't take the places of honour, but take the lowest place at the foot of the table” – he isn't just speaking theoretically. He's describing literally what he just did. Jesus is practicing what he preaches. By healing that disabled man, by calling out the synagogue leaders for their hypocrisy, Jesus takes the lowest place, he throws in his lot with the people at the bottom. Of course, if that's true, the rest of his parable seems pretty unlikely to happen, right? In the parable, the person who takes the

lowest place is approached by the host and honoured with a better seat, but that's not exactly likely to happen for Jesus at this particular party. His host has been publically insulted, and at this point he would probably prefer Jesus just leave. But Jesus is thinking of a bigger party than the little shindig in this local town. The party that Jesus is thinking of is the party in the Kingdom of heaven, the party of God's coming reign of love and peace and joy, and at that party, Jesus is the host. At that party, Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and as far as Jesus is concerned, that party has already started, the Kingdom has already come. And just like in the parable, Jesus as the host of the party is telling the people who think they're on top, the self-righteous religious types who think they're so wonderful, Jesus tells them that that they need to drop down a few pegs, move down a few seats, that they're not as important as they think. And as host of that Kingdom party, Jesus goes to the man at the bottom, the disabled man rejected and dismissed by his community, and Jesus tells him, Friend, we have a better place for you! Because that's the whole point of the gospel – in Jesus Christ, God went to the bottom, God became a human being and shared our suffering and pain and even death so that we could be lifted up, so that we could find our place in the Kingdom of Heaven, so that we could understand that in the eyes of God, we are not worthless. At the party in the Kingdom of Heaven, the exalted are humbled, the humble are exalted.

And that party is still going on. The Kingdom of heaven that broke into this world through Jesus Christ, through his life and death and resurrection, that party is still going on, here and now and every day until Christ returns. And as followers of Jesus Christ, as his representatives and ambassadors, all too often we forget our place at the party. The world around us loves to make us think that our value is defined by all these meaningless criteria: by the balance of our bank accounts or our facial symmetry; by how fast we can skate or run; by what we contribute to the economy, what we can produce or accumulate. And we are told how much or how little we should value the people around us, how we should rank our friends and neighbours and people around the world as more or less important, more or less deserving of our attention, our resources, our care; forced to decide whether an Israeli or a Palestinian life is more valuable, whether or not a drug addict deserves their suffering; whether industry and development is more important than the health of a community or the health of the entire planet. All day every day, in ways we barely even notice, we are playing the Price is Right with people's lives, and we start believing that its true, that our own value is determined by what other people think of us. We start looking down our noses at the people who don't quite fit in, we assume that the people at the bottom are there because they deserve to be there, because they aren't as virtuous or hard-working or holy as we are. We can so easily start measuring the value of human beings by the standards of the world around us, trying to

figure out exactly where we fit and exactly what we're worth. But all that playing that game gets us is more worry, more fear, more despair, trying and failing to measure up in all these meaningless ways. And that's not the life Jesus wants for his children. That's not what the kingdom of heaven is supposed to look like. Our worth is not determined by any earthly status or social hierarchy, by any human definition of success. Our worth is determined by the love of Jesus Christ, God's decision to value us so highly that the creator of the universe considered us worth dying for. And when we know how precious we are in the eyes of God, when we know the lengths that Jesus went to to bring us back into relationship with our heavenly Father, then we know we have nothing to prove, nothing to fear, no ladder to climb, no games to play. Instead of wasting our lives trying to get ahead, trying to prove ourselves worthy, we can head for the lowest places, the lowliest people, in humility we can get rid of all those meaningless symbols of earthly status and spend our lives among the poor and the lost and the outcast, all the people our world considers worthless, because that's where we'll find Jesus Christ. That's where we'll meet with the King of Kings. That's where the party in the kingdom of heaven is about to begin. When you know your worth in the eyes of God, you can see the world around you the way Jesus sees it, you can see your neighbours the way Jesus sees them, you can find your place in the celebration of God's love that will never end. In Jesus Christ, the

kingdom of heaven has come – the party has started. Come find your place. In the name of Jesus Christ - Amen.