

Proverbs 25:6-7a

⁶Do not honor yourself in a king's presence.
Do not stand in a place reserved for great people,
⁷because it is better to be told, "Come up here,"
than for you to be humiliated before a ruler.

Come up Here

I.

To do it meant probable death. A person never *ever* just walked in to the presence of the king and started talking. You just wouldn't *think* of being so forward. The king was the all-powerful individual in every circumstance. Not his most trusted advisor, not even his wife, would speak to him without being spoken to first.

In fact, to indicate that you wished to speak, one would prostrate him or her-self. There wasn't just some sort of perfunctory head nod for a bow, like this. There wasn't even a deep bow to indicate that you knew you were in the presence of royalty, or someone more powerful than yourself, like this. Instead, it was full on get down on your knees and put your face to the floor. And wait. Like this.

You might be waiting for a while. The king might be contemplating whether he is interested in what you have to say or not. If you are not currently in a favored position, he might never give you that tap on the shoulder that would allow you to speak.

King Solomon wrote: "Do not honor yourself in a king's presence. Do not stand in a place reserved for great people, ⁷because it is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than for you to be humiliated" (Proverbs 25:6-7, EHV).

As king, Solomon knew how all this worked. Did he give any orders to have one executed for speaking without first getting approval? We don't know. Almost certainly he humbled a few people who were presumptuous.

We shift the scene; from a king's court to a banquet hall. A leader of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a grand dinner in today's Gospel.

The other Pharisees invited had probably been there just previously when Jesus had spoken about the narrow door, and talked about the last in line. We listened in to Jesus speak about that narrow door, too. We applied what he said. Some try to claim a place in line because they came to church and heard readings from the Bible and sermons; they even came to communion at the Lord's Table. Coming to church and even receiving the Lord's Supper without faith is not going to be enough to go through the narrow door. Some would look to their family history and say they deserve a place in heaven because of the faithfulness of family members from the past. That doesn't get a person through the narrow door, either.

The Pharisees hadn't gotten the hint about the narrow door. It was all well and good for *other people* to consider themselves last in line. It was important for the masses to realize that they couldn't cut to the front of the line. But this was obviously *not* meant for them. They were the elites.

Even with no king in Israel any more, Jesus finds the Proverb from King Solomon something that could be applied to the Pharisees' situation.

People at a fancy banquet might be intent on jockeying for position. Each looked for the

most important position that seemed to be in their reach. Jesus said that one who took too important a position might be asked to move down a few notches. Someone else might be asked to move up. “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11, EHV).

II.

The scene shifts again. It’s graduation time at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Students have immersed themselves in language study through four years of pre-seminary college. Four years after that—the first two on the Seminary campus, then a vicar year under the supervision of a veteran pastor, then one last year at the Seminary—they finally walk the aisle in preaching robes to receive their graduate degree.

It’s an exciting day, to be sure. Everyone has put in many hours of study to achieve this goal. This is what the diploma looks like; this is what is usually hanging in my office. It makes every graduate standing there pretty important, doesn’t it? But wait a minute. Use your best Latin scholarship and read these words written here: *Candidatum Reverendi Ministerii*. That first word is the most important. *Candidatum* means candidate. Just because a man has that degree from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, it does not automatically mean that he is a pastor. He dare not elevate himself to the position of pastor, either.

To be called “Pastor” is not about making it through rigorous course work. It is not about a piece of paper. This is what that piece of paper is worth.

Come to think of it, that piece of paper *is* worth *something*. It’s only to demonstrate that a man is a “candidate” for the public ministry. To have that piece of paper is to put the prospective pastor’s face on the ground before the King of kings and wait.

Perhaps there will be a tap on the shoulder. The *call* is what is important. Through Christ’s Church the pastor is called to a particular area of ministry. That’s what allows him to get up and serve God’s people.

III.

Back to the king’s throne room. “Do not honor yourself in a king’s presence. Do not stand in a place reserved for great people, ⁷because it is better to be told, ‘Come up here,’ than for you to be humiliated” (Proverbs 25:6-7, EHV).

It’s *the* King. The throne room belongs to the Almighty God. How presumptuous would it be to exalt yourself in the presence of the Almighty God, the One we call the Maker of heaven and earth? How presumptuous to look for the seat of honor in his banquet hall and plop yourself down unceremoniously in that seat!

Jesus says to us: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will endure” (John 15:16, EHV). There was a tap on your shoulder. Jesus himself *chose* you. Professor Deutschlander says in *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*: “It is simply impossible to exhaust the comfort for each penitent sinner that comes from this truth... Your faith is neither your own work nor the result of your own merit nor the consequence of a coincidental birth in a Christian family or near a Christian church. No, it is all God’s arrangement. It is all the result of his will in eternity, worked out in time” (Daniel Deutschlander, [“The Narrow Lutheran Middle,”](#) Ch. 5).

From eternity God planned for *you* to be called into his kingdom. You present yourself, unworthy though you are by nature, and he taps you on the shoulder. He adopted you into his family by the waters of baptism. He strengthens and preserves your faith through the food of the Supper of Jesus’ body and blood, given and poured out for you. He gives you the green grass and fresh water of his Word to study. Every day you can be refreshed to meet

the challenges of a new day, because the King himself has blessed you and told you: “Come up here.”

IV.

Yet again the scene shifts. The banquet hall is left behind. So is the seminary graduation ceremony. Even the King’s throne room is left behind—King Solomon’s, at least.

Rather than in heaven, we find ourselves in heaven’s waiting room. Not Florida, though some give Florida that moniker. We’re in church.

James, in today’s Second Reading, says: “Suppose a man enters your worship assembly wearing gold rings and fine clothing, and a poor man also enters wearing filthy clothing” (James 2:2, EHV).

This time the focus isn’t on you as a person entering a king’s presence, or even the presence of *the* King of kings. The focus isn’t some attendee at a banquet.

This time look at Solomon’s Proverb from the opposite angle. *You* are the person in a king-like position. *You* are the Master of Ceremonies at a banquet.

You are the insider at a worship service. An outsider comes in and wants to join you for worship. How do you treat that individual? “If you look with favor on the man wearing fine clothing and say, ‘Sit here in this good place,’ but you tell the poor man, ‘Stand over there’ or ‘Sit down here at my feet,’ ⁴have you not made a distinction among yourselves and become judges with evil opinions?” (James 2:3-4, EHV).

“Don’t judge a book by its cover.” That was the old saying.

How many times have you passed by a great book because the cover was unappealing? How many times have you failed to watch a great movie or series on TV because the trailer just wasn’t very exciting?

On the other hand, how many times have you been convinced by the trailer that a movie was going to be great, only to find out that everything that was interesting about the movie was in the trailer? Just watching that was all you needed. How often have you read some critically acclaimed novel—even a classic—wondering how anyone could find this drivel entertaining?

It’s easy to judge, isn’t it? It’s easy to pre-judge, just by looking at someone—what kind of clothing they are wearing, how they carry themselves, what station of life they appear to be in.

Soon we will be starting an Evangelism series as our Sunday Bible class: “Let’s Go.” The first part we will be looking at is “Love.”

Jesus loved you and me unconditionally. He gave us that tap on the shoulder when we didn’t deserve to be recognized at all and brought us in to his family. Now that we are in his family, let’s make that our attitude, too. Let’s go. Let’s bring people in to the family of God. Let’s welcome. Let’s extend the King of kings’ invitation to them: “Come up here.” Amen.