

Mary's song, the Magnificat sings the themes of Luke's gospel. Mary sings of an upside-down world and Luke tells endless stories of the manner in which Jesus turns the world upside down. Let's just refresh our memory and hear a couple lines of Mary's song once again.

*For he that is mighty hath magnified me and holy is his Name. And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations. He hath shewed strength with his arm he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

This is an upside-down world to be sure. And Luke tells story after story that carries out this theme. Of Luke 14 only verses 7-14 are appointed for our Gospel today. But all of Luke 14:1-24 deals with the same topic: the upside-down world. I encourage you to read them during the week.

The two stories that follow in 14:8-11 and 12-14 are first a story about being invited to a banquet, and then about inviting others to your own banquet. Jesus had noticed at the house of the Pharisee how the guests just came in and assumed that the places of honour at the banquet were for them. So he told them a story. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, 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.'" Just think of how humiliating that would be! You come in and take a choice seat and then the party giver boots you out of your seat and directs you to a seat of lesser honour. A little chunk of your personal world has just been turned upside down. You thought too highly of yourself! Shame on you.

Jesus' advice is that when you come to a banquet you should take the seat in the lowest place. The host may then come to you and say, "Friend, move up higher." Jesus continues saying, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Jesus turns the world upside down as well.

Then Jesus offers advice to us when we are the ones planning the banquet. We are to follow the same upside down principle. We are not to invite our friends. We are not to invite our relatives or our rich neighbours. When we act in that way we are simply thinking that the people we invited will invite us back to their next party. Rather, Jesus says, "... when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (v. 13). This is an upside-down world to be sure!

Luke's gospel makes it abundantly clear over and over again that the God revealed in Jesus has an upside-down way of thinking compared to our normal train of thought. The world that God enfolds through the ministry of Jesus Christ simply turns our normal ways of thinking upside down.

We could probably say that gaining prestige for ourselves is the Australian way of life. Prestige is an important commodity for each and every one of us. It started out when we were children. As kids we soon learned the importance of being somebody! We could gain "somebody" status in a variety of ways. Maybe we were the best looking boy or girl in our class. Or we came from a very wealthy family. That was always impressive. Another way to gain prestige was through our academic achievements. How good it felt to have the teacher and some of the other kids admire us for our

brainpower! Prowess in sport was another powerful avenue to prestige. Great ability in the arts and music field was another pathway to prestige, but less than sport.

However we seek or sought prestige as children, our goal was to be noticed by others, to be accepted as a person of worth, to be appreciated for our gifts. We wanted to be the top of our class in something. We wanted to achieve status and prestige for ourselves. It's the core longing of human beings we are talking about here. And when we achieved success in an area of life, we could easily feel that we were on the top of the world looking down on others.

When we become adults seeking to achieve "top of the world" status there are many avenues open to us. We do have our pride after all! We are very interested at times in achieving a high level of prestige for ourselves. We can achieve status for ourselves, for example, by the size of our income or our professional reputation. In our country it is assumed that big money means a big person. Or maybe we try to make an impression on others by the size of the house and suburb we live in or the new car we just bought. We can be awarded achievement status at work. We can be very proud of our academic qualifications and status in the Church. Some might achieve status and prestige because we are beautiful people or that the person to whom we married is a truly marvellous looking man or woman. Or, we are admired by all for the way we are bringing up our children or for the accomplishments of our children. In any of these ways and more we can achieve status on the "top of the world" so to speak. It is just a basic human instinct that we want to live on the "top of the world." We want to be on the top looking down. It just feels so good, and it is so fundamentally human.

We confront a basic fact here. We long for prestige. We long to be on the top looking down. We long to be honoured for our achievements. And then we remind ourselves of the Magnificat and the stories from Luke. When you go to a banquet do not take the seat of a high achiever. Take the lowest seat and the hosts may call you to sit in a higher place. When you give a banquet don't invite the influential or prestige people in town. You can do that, of course, and they will invite you back. Your achievement status is kept strong. But Jesus says, "No," to all of this. When you give a banquet invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then comes Jesus' punch line: "You will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

In other words, in God's upside-down world, real status and prestige is not something we achieve. Status and prestige is something we receive from God as a gift. Status in the kingdom of God is not achieved. It is received. It is a gift. And this gift can free us from a world that can hold us in slavery to our need to achieve our own reward. Prestige in the kingdom of God comes through receiving. It does not come through our achieving.

Jesus speaks to us through these stories today. He speaks to us of grace. "I see you today in slavery to a world of achievement. I see in you the deep need to be on top of the world. I see in you longing for prestige. I have come to invite you to receive, rather than achieve. I have come to turn everything upside down when it comes to the deep need of human achievement. I have come to invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind to my banquet. I have come to invite you to my eternal banquet. You are mine. You are mine now and forever. Join me at the top of the world." There is your prestige and status! Receive it as a gift. Amen.