

## **"Friend, Come up Higher!"**

**Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 & Luke 14:1, 7-14**

**August 29, 2004**

*I suppose that I will never read this text without thinking of a Seminary professor that I had who loved the line "Friend, come up higher!" He used it often on me when I first took his class. He was a Greek & New Testament professor and I was a terrible Greek student. Being afraid of being called on to read the Greek text I always sat in the back of the room by the door and tried to look small. But inevitably he would come back to where I was sitting and with a twinkle in his eye and a big grin he would say, "Friend, come up higher!" It was terribly irritating and embarrassing and I would find myself sitting right next to the teacher. But with time I came to understand that he wasn't picking on me - it was just that he really liked his students and wanted the best for them. We became fast friends, I baby sat for his kids, visited often in his home and we traveled in Europe together as friends.*

*"Friend, come up higher!" It is such a gracious invitation. It is spoken to those, who for one reason or another have placed themselves in a lower position than the one who had invited wants for them. You are unsure of yourself and your relationship and don't want to presume more than you should for fear of being humiliated. But then the one who has given the invitation comes to you, finding you in the crowd and says, "oh, please, don't hid here in the back of the room. You are important to me - come with me - sit with me at the head table."*

*Have you ever had that kind of experience? It is an awesome thing to know that you are valued - and it doesn't matter if it is an important, fancy affair or just a quiet gathering - to be invited up is to know that someone cares about you and wants you. And in a simple way this is the good news of the Gospel and the word with which we evangelize / call people to Christ. We are estranged from God and actually try to hid from Him. We hope that God is gracious, forgiving and loves us - but we know our brokenness. But our God comes to us and invites us to come into His presence. Our relationship was strained and broken by sin - still God comes and says: "Friend, come up higher", come, be with me.*

*I have thought that I would be remiss if I didn't share this gracious invitation with you. It is a perfect time to go to those of you sitting in the back or in the balcony and invite you - 'Friends, come up higher. You are of far too much value to be sitting way back there in the cheap seats. God treasures you and wants you to be closer.' What do you think? Would you feel the graciousness and warmth of that invitation - or would I just be embarrassing you?*

*One of my favorite stories was about the pastor who was constantly trying to get his church members to move forward in church. One day a wealthy member of the congregation told the pastor that he would fix the problem - but the congregation would have to worship in another location for 3 months while some remodeling was done and no one was to ask questions or snoop around. They agreed and 3 months later returned to their church building for the first time. The pastor was the first to arrive with the man who had planned and paid for the renovations. To the pastor's surprise what he notice was that there was only one pew and it was way in the back of the church. But he was told to just wait and watch. As people started to arrive they were seated in the one pew. Suddenly, when it was full, it quickly and quietly moved by the pull of a hidden chain to the very front of the church and another pew appeared from a hidden chamber to be filled and carry the people forward when it too was full. The pastor loved it and congratulated the man who did the remodeling. But there were other renovations that had been made that the pastor didn't know about yet. The complaint of the pastor was that the people sat in the back - but the complaint of the people was that the pastor's sermons were too long and that problem had been addressed too. During the sermon that morning - when 20 minutes had passed, a bell chimed and*

*suddenly floor in the pulpit opened and the pastor dropped out of sight. And the people were happy with that change.*

*Friend, come up higher! What a gracious invitation our God extends to us. He sets His table and all are invited to commune with Him. No one is more important to Him than you. He makes no distinctions in His invitation between the rich, famous, powerful and you or me. Such a thing is almost impossible for us. We always are very quick to determine who is more important, who we want to invite to sit by us at the table. We have a clearly defined hierarchy of who is important - who is worthy and who is not. Perhaps we would like to say that we are above that kind of pettiness but it would be very easy to think of the many ways that we draw distinctions between people that we would consider important and who is unimportant / or less worthy. Imagine what we would feel or do if one Sunday Governor Hoven or our Bishop came to join us for worship and coffee afterwards. We would be all a-flutter and try our best to get them the best seat and place them at the head of the coffee line. But what if on that same Sunday a drifter, unbathed, unshaven also appeared at the back of the church - what invitation would we extend to that person. I guess there are other texts that deal with that kind of theme and I won't take that any further - but I think of that as a comparison to the invitation of God. "Friend, come up higher!"*

*In the second lesson for today, the author is lumping together a bunch of disconnected thoughts as he brings his letter to the Hebrews to a close. One of the closing thoughts calls for us to "Keep our lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have...." The author goes on to remind the reader of the reason that they should be content. And the reason is that God has promised to never leave us or forsake us. --- In many ways, as I think about the Gospel invitation, it seems to me that this call to be content with what we have could just as easily have been a call to be content with who you are. --- I suppose that for most of us that is just as hard as being content with what we have. We are so often unhappy with what we see of ourselves - we want to be more - more like someone else that is more popular, more intelligent, a better athlete, a better Christian, a better parent, taller, shorter, slimmer, stronger, just better - different. But God's promise is always, "I will never leave you or forsake you". And He comes to us - He comes to you - and says; "'Friend, come up higher.'" Come to my table - know that you are my honored guest - you are precious in my sight.'*

*We must always come to Him in humility because we know our sin and our shortcomings - but the invitation will remain the same. "Friend, come .....*

**AMEN**