

Jeremiah 2:4-13
 Psalm 81:1, 10-16
 Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
 Luke 14:1, 7-14

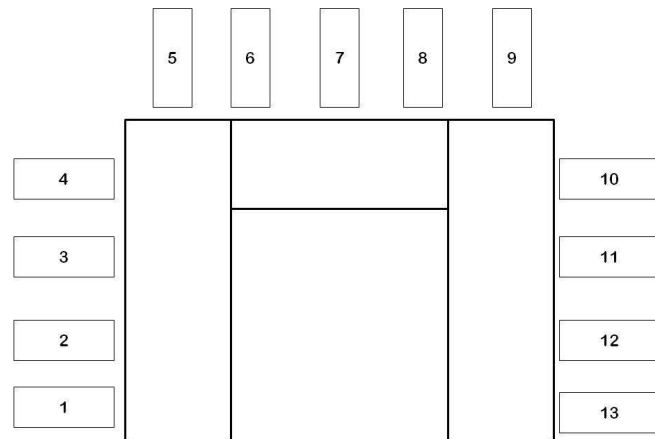
Notes on the Gospel Lesson

Luke 14: 1, 7 - 14

Formal meals anywhere in the first century Roman Empire took place at a table with a special design. These were called *triclinium tables* because of their three sides. They were shaped as an inverted “U” and people would dine reclined on their left side, eating with their right hands (see photo right). As an aside, eating in this position explains why the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears had such ready access to them.



Each position at the table was important. (See diagram at right). The host was in Position 2 while the guest of honor reclined in position 3. Position 1, although it had some prestige, was a place of responsibility. It was this person who would go to the kitchen and bring the food back to the other guests. The other positions, numbers 4 - 13 in this diagram, were in declining order of prestige. In other words, the person in Position 5 had a higher standing in the host’s eyes than the person in Position 9 and the person in Position 8 had a higher status the one in Position 12.



Jesus’ words in this passage are wise counsel. It would be humiliating for a guest to assume that he would belong at Position 4 and then be told by the host to move down to Position 10. It would be far better to start at the bottom of the table and be moved up to Position 8. It is in Jesus’ next statement that he draws the ire of his Pharisaic hosts.

There are 613 individual laws in the Law of Moses. Of this number, only about one-third applies to all of the people. The remaining two-thirds apply only to priests. What distinguished the Pharisees from other Jews of the first century is that they understood passages such as Isaiah 61: 1 - 5 and 62: 11-12 to mean that the people of Israel were to be a holy people; a nation of priests. Therefore all 613 tenets of the Torah applied to all Jews.

This belief had certain consequences. The Torah prevented some people from serving as priests. The Pharisees believed that these people, regardless of their birth as Jews, were outside of the covenant community. Leviticus 21:16 - 21 lists a number of conditions that disqualified a descendant of Aaron from serving as a priest. The Pharisees believed that these same conditions rendered a person an outcast. They were not only excluded as priests; they were excluded from all things.

Leviticus 21:18 includes those who are blind or lame as those who are excluded. It must have been jarring to the ears of the Pharisees with whom Jesus was dining when he said that “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” were the very people that one should invite to a banquet. It was these outcasts to whom friendship and hospitality should be given.