

# “Healing Through An Egoless Life”

Luke 14:7-14

September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001 –Philip Siddons

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When Luke described this lesson on humility from Jesus, he, alone, was the only gospel writer to do it. Students of Luke’s writing know that Luke was personally interested in Jesus’ disdain over those who were wealthy or powerful who disregarded the impoverished and outcasts in that society. Notice, briefly, how Luke arranged this material.

Just before this teaching on humility, Luke, alone, told of how Jesus was a dinner guest at the home of a Pharisee. Just to upset the judging religious lawyers and Pharisees who were present, He tossed them this question: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”

They were smart enough to know Jesus already didn’t care for their precise judgments on other people’s lives and they knew He had tremendous power so they kept their mouths shut.

Not waiting for any of them to try to argue, He healed a man with dropsy<sup>1</sup> right in front of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Dropsy, or Edema is a swelling of the limbs. *Also spelled Oedema, plural Edemas, or Edemata*, in medicine, an abnormal accumulation of watery fluid in the intercellular spaces of connective tissue. Edematous tissues are swollen and, when punctured, secrete a thin incoagulable fluid. This fluid is essentially an ultrafiltrate of serum but also contains small amounts of protein. Minor differences in composition are found in various diseases with which edema is associated. Generalized edema (also called **dropsy**, or hydrops) may involve the cavities of the body as well as the tissues with the excessive accumulation of fluid. Edema is most frequently a symptom of disease rather than a disease in itself, and it may have a number of causes, most of which can be traced back to gross variations in the physiological mechanisms that normally maintain a constant water balance in the cells, tissues, and blood. Among the causes may be diseases of the kidneys, heart, veins, or lymphatic system; malnutrition; or allergic reactions. The treatment of edema generally consists of correcting the underlying cause, such as improving kidney or heart function. Edema may be a purely local condition (e.g., hives), or it may be a general one (e.g., nephrotic



As he was writing, Luke then decided to follow up this lesson on humility with Jesus’ parable about the great supper.<sup>2</sup> The point of this supper parable was that while God invites *all* to enjoy the blessings God offers, most everyone gives excuses about being too busy. In response to this apathy and disregard, God ignores the people (who weren’t interested) and aggressively goes out and brings in all the people who had been discarded by these busy self-important people who had first been invited. We can see, by the way Luke arranged this material of Jesus, that he saw the parable about humility to relate to a much larger picture than just Jesus advising people to be humble. Here’s how.

Remember the dinner setting of the religious leaders who routinely judged someone’s worth by their conformity to their own puny human-made religious laws. Then, on the other side of Jesus’ words about humility, was the parable about those who didn’t care about God’s personal invitation to a better life. How God was disgusted by that apathy and sought out people who had been left behind or cast aside by this arrogant self-absorbed society. So to with the advice on humility.

It isn’t a matter of not being proud and thinking more of ourselves than we should. It’s about our entire outlook on life – what we think of other people and how we view living beings in this world. Jesus’ teaching is a somber incitement against hierarchal thinking – the belief that every person and every life form should be fit into some chain of command of



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edema). A swelling of the limbs, face, or some other region of the body is sometimes referred to as anasarca.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew had included this parable as well but his version was about a king throwing a marriage reception whereas Luke’s rendition was a non-royal person having a great banquet. From britannica.com.

worth. Put another way: when we categorize and judge someone to be less worthy than ourselves, we are carrying out the opposite of how Jesus was telling us how to live our lives.



There's only one path to escape our societies' judging negativity about the worth of people. It comes by integrating Jesus' teachings about God's love for the outcasts and the suffering into how we look at every person and living being on this earth.<sup>3</sup>

In the science fiction movie *The Matrix*, humans are born into a world where their own bodies were kept in a life-support pod while their brain is fed images of an entire world.<sup>4</sup> While the majority of our lives is pretty straight-forward and has much beauty and delight, we are still bombarded by the bad dream of negative thinking by our society. Without realizing it, we are fed negative information by the television and radio and many of the people with whom we talk on a daily basis.

We're constantly told that we would be happy if we had more things and experiences. The idea that bad things happen to people because they bring it on themselves – is one of the many lies we tend to believe. We falsely believe that people we see in films or on television are somehow better than we are and should be listened to. We tend to believe that they must be smarter or better than we are because we're not getting their salaries, driving in their cars, living in their houses or as familiar to as many as they.

We still don't get this because every time we meet a media person, we're absolutely shocked that they are, in fact, a feet-on-the-ground "normal" person like us.



<sup>3</sup> It can also be learned from the teachings of the Buddhist tradition which heavily emphasizes the oneness of all of life and adherence to a life of compassion and non-striving.

<sup>4</sup> This is briefly described by Tara Bennett-Goleman's *Emotional Alchemy, How The Mind Can Heal the Heart*, p.269 ISBN 0609607529. The illusion was also portrayed in a John Saul novel as well as in the *X-Files* movie.

We can't believe it but once we meet someone "famous" and after we tell everyone we know we've actually met Mel Gibson or Sharon Stone, we forget what we learned and we go through the rest of our lives as if these people are gods and goddesses. Jesus would tell us to get a life of our own.



Jesus offers us one if we open up a space in our mind and awareness to look at the world differently than we have been. This requires that we stop thinking of people and other life forms like we did when we were children. This means that we have to stop thinking of others like we did when we were in high school or college. It means that no matter what we thought of certain people (and groups of people) ten years ago, we've got to change our thinking. Jesus calls us to change and think differently than perhaps we did ten years ago or five years ago or yesterday, . . . or early this morning.

It is enormously difficult to break the habits of our thinking that have become so deeply scored into our automatic responses to life. To do so, we actually have to stop ourselves, in mid thought, in the nanoseconds before we act. This is hard to do because we're such creatures of habit. Fortunately, the kind of work we are called to do is mapped out in the book study in which many of us will be involved this fall.<sup>5</sup>



① The work of change and gaining control of our thoughts, feelings and actions is, actually, central to our spiritual growth. It involves becoming mindful of the life-traps that we were fed in our growing up. These traps consisted of the damaging thinking that we are unworthy and deserve to be abandoned or that we have failed in our lives. This is the thinking that we, somehow,

<sup>5</sup> It is and was already cited, Tara Bennett-Goleman's *Emotional Alchemy, How The Mind Can Heal the Heart*. For information on the readings and class, see this website if it is still available when you read this: [http://www.geocities.com/philip\\_siddons/EmotionalAlchemyReadingLink.html](http://www.geocities.com/philip_siddons/EmotionalAlchemyReadingLink.html)

deserve to be excluded, dominated or are more vulnerable because we have not met the relentless standards that others have held up before us.



② Once we become mindful of these powerful life-traps,<sup>6</sup> our next task is to make a conscious decision not to get caught up in them. It means when we are in a conversation with people with whom we feel safe, and the talk turns to negative thoughts about another person (or group of people), we've got to either state our intention not to perpetuate this negativity or walk away from those people. In either case, it will make everyone not feel safe in their cocoon of negative thinking and speaking. When you get out of the life-trap, some people may follow but they must be authentic to themselves and act or they'll continue to be trapped by this familiar cocoon of negativity.



③ The third task, that immediately follows, is that of transforming our thinking so that two things happen. Jesus taught us these two things but we usually don't discipline our minds to do them.

① First, we have to transform how we see the world. We have to view the world different than what we've been taught – perhaps different from how we interpreted the world when we had breakfast this morning. Jesus calls us to throw out the hierarchal better-than judging that constantly goes on and embrace a sense of connectedness with all living beings. Jesus taught us this when He said, when we do something kind to the “least of these” it is as if we were doing it to Him.

When the three boys tormented and grossly tortured a family's pet donkey and horse,<sup>7</sup> it outraged people across the country. The actual details of their violence far and away went

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<sup>6</sup> or “Schemas” that are summarized by Tara Bennett-Goleman and Jeffrey E. Young and Janet S. Klosko's *Reinventing Your Life, The Breakthrough Program to End Negative Behavior and Feel* ISBN number 0-452-27204-1  
<sup>7</sup> In August of 2001. See Donn Esmond's article “Kind person can put rage behind her” in *The Buffalo News*, September 3, 2001

beyond a one night drunken cruelty to animals.<sup>8</sup> But cruelty takes place with human beings as well. These life traps that cause abuse, anger, wrong thinking and sometimes horrible behavior – account for suffering in humanity and wildlife. All the evil in the world and our lives comes from the view of the world that we are not all connected and interdependent upon one another.

When one person walks the street in despair from not being able to give him or herself in productive work with others, it is your problem and my problem because we are connected. It's not automatically because the unemployed person brought it on themselves by being lazy or dishonest.

When one person lays in their home in great pain, after they've been discharged from the hospital because of a decision of the health care provider, it is your problem and my problem. It isn't something they've brought on themselves but is a result of the greed and the indifference of all of us who continue to think that some people are more worthy than others to receive health care.

So the first part of what we have to fix is our own view of the world. We simply have to disagree with what most everyone around us thinks. We fix our own mentality by seeing that we are all connected and inter-dependent on one another.

② The second part of our thinking that we must transform is what we think of ourselves. American capitalism and American individualism has taught us to raise our ego to the top of the pyramid. We have been taught that *we* are the center of the universe and that *our personal needs* not only should be met but must be met. We even have print, video and audio advertising telling us, all day long, about needs that must be met that we didn't even know we had.



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<sup>8</sup> The pregnant donkey was beaten, stabbed and blinded by shots from a BB rifle; the donkey and one horse were sodomized with a broom handle and rifle. One of the boys came back a second night for more cruelty.

There is a positive side of having a healthy self-concept. Jesus told us to love others at least as much as we love ourselves and that assumed we are to have respect and love for ourselves as beings created by and in the image of our personal and loving God. We should have self-confidence and motivation. But the balancing point is what is addressed in Jesus' story about seating order in the dinner.

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“Forgetting self and taking up one's cross” and His other teachings about loving the unlovable and the outcasts – point to a deeper teaching about emptying ourselves of our ego.



Mother Theresa's life wasn't an ego-driven life. It was about selfless giving without expectation of getting something in return, . . . without the hope of media attention, attention by talk show hosts, book advances or newspaper articles.

Selflessness is about going about our lives without a focus on *our* fears, *our* compulsions and *our* life-traps. It's about spontaneous acts of goodness and kindness. That's why you and I are drawn to acts of loving-kindness. It is why we are drawn to find needs people have and try, with our talents and abilities, to meet them. The Spirit within us draws us to heal, to uplift and to, in some way, make life better for others.

As we set aside our 'self' and become more present in the lives of others, compassion emerges.<sup>9</sup> It doesn't mean we don't have our personal views, needs or feelings about things but it does mean that we're not *driven* by them. We can actually look at life as full of opportunities for togetherness.<sup>10</sup> Times when we can forget about ourselves and joyfully respond to others as we go about our days and these people's needs unfold before us.

It means you can help someone with a resume without trying to show them all the places in which they've made poor career moves. It means you can be kind and helpful to someone who, themselves, is so judging and caustic with others that they are like a social black hole. It has to do

<sup>9</sup> *Alchemy*, page 275, already cited.

<sup>10</sup> “equanimity in Bennett-Goldman's wording, p.275

with accepting others at face value and intentionally finding ways to be a positive presence in moments of their life that coincide with moments of your life.

The man who is the chief teacher and leader of the Buddhist faith expression, the Dalai Lama, seems to exemplify, in our lifetime, a good example of living with a sense of compassion and connectedness with others. In my own mind, from what I know of him, if he had lived two thousand years ago, he probably would have been a close friend of Jesus.

But just after it was announced that he would receive the Nobel Peace Prize, a great number of photographers jostled for the best camera position and TV crews were everywhere. Journalists were shouting to get their questions heard. It would be a moment in time of crowning personal achievement in anyone's life. So the very first question came, “How do you feel about winning the Nobel Prize?”



His response was, “I feel happy,” (and after adding a thoughtful pause, he continued) “for my friends who wanted me to receive it.”<sup>11</sup>

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This sense of connectedness with all others and lack of ego has long been taught by Jesus. Paul's Corinthian poem described it well.

“This love, of which I speak, is slow to lose patience. It looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive. It's neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.

Love has good manners and is not selfish. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of others.

On the contrary, it is glad with all good people when the truth prevails. Love knows no limit to its endurance – no end to its trust – no fading of its hope. It can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.”<sup>12</sup>

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Jesus calls us to achieve eternal life. The only thing that is keeping us from it is ego. Get rid of the ego. ☸

<sup>11</sup> *Emotional Alchem*, page 275, already cited

<sup>12</sup> From 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13