

My cousin Steve uses a wheelchair. He's my age. When we were in high school he suffered a brain tumor and has been in a chair ever since. But he has kept his sense of humor. Steve lives in Kansas City now, and he has made me more alert to the needs of people who cannot walk. He visited St. Munchin recently, and I proudly used our ramp that allows someone in a wheelchair to get up into the church. Steve wheeled up and down the aisles a bit, and he liked the looks of things. I pointed out, a little embarrassed, that the confessional here is up a step and in that room. He smiled his evil grin and said, "That's OK. People in wheelchairs don't commit sins anyway."

In the United States we've become more attentive to the needs of the disabled, and it is making us a better country. When we make accommodations for those who need assistance, we make the world a better place. We also obey the command that Jesus gives in today's gospel.

In the story, a leading Pharisee has invited Jesus to dinner on a Sabbath. While he's there, a man with dropsy enters. Now, seated at table are all the local religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees – the ministerial alliance of the day. Jesus asks them if it is permissible to heal on the Sabbath. They don't answer. So, he cures the guy. Then he reminds the guests that they should not seek places of honor at the table. The humble shall be exalted. It's likely that the servants for this meal were women. We can only guess how much they enjoyed this part of the conversation. Then, Jesus suggests to the host that these aren't the guests he should have invited anyway. He should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind – people like that dude with dropsy. "Blessed will you be because of their inability to repay you." Do favors for people who cannot do favors back, Jesus says. Usually when you invite a guest for dinner you expect the meal to be delightful. But when Jesus showed up for dinner, he might upset everyone at the table. It makes you wonder why they kept eating with the guy.

Do favors for people who cannot do favors back. We do that when we take care of people in wheelchairs, when you drive a kid home from soccer practice, and when we bury the dead. It happens all the time. Our schools are generally very good at this. Everybody in this country is entitled to an education, even if you cannot vote or contribute to a campaign. I think Jesus would be pleased with our schools. But I wonder what the country would look like if we applied Jesus' advice to other areas. Do favors for people who cannot do favors back. What would our immigration policy look like? How might health care improve? What would our tax laws be? How would marriage and family life be if we did things without expecting something in return? How would we treat our neighbor? How would we drive? If you come to dinner with Jesus, he still has a way of upsetting the guests.