

Luke 14:1,7-14

14 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to share a meal in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees, they were watching him closely.

7 When Jesus noticed how the guests sought out the best seats at the table, he told them a parable. 8 “When someone invites you to a wedding celebration, don’t take your seat in the place of honor. Someone more highly regarded than you could have been invited by your host. 9 The host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give your seat to this other person.’ Embarrassed, you will take your seat in the least important place. 10 Instead, when you receive an invitation, go and sit in the least important place. When your host approaches you, he will say, ‘Friend, move up here to a better seat.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. 11 All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

12 Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, “When you host a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. 13 Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. 14 And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected.”

May God bless to our understanding the Words that we hear today.

Did you hear the one about the Football coach who asked one of his former players, let’s call him “Mike”, for help recruiting new players?

"Sure, coach. What kind of player are you looking for?" The coach said, "Well you know there's that fellow, you knock him down, he just stays down?" Mike said, "We don't want him, do we, coach?"

"No, that's right. Then there's that fellow, you knock him down and he gets up, you knock him down again and he stays down." Mike said, "We don't want him either do we coach?"

Coach said, "No, but you know the fellow, you knock him down, he gets up. Knock him down, he gets up. Knock him down, he gets up. Knock him down, he gets up."

Is THAT the guy we want coach?" The coach answered, "No, no, we don't want him either. I want you to find the guy who's knocking everybody down. That's the guy we want." And it's true isn't it? If we are going to be honest with ourselves that's the guy we want to be seen with too!

And you know while we don't want to hang out with someone who is ruthless, we all kind of want to hang out with people who are something, people who have some power, people who are successful because maybe others will think of us as successful and powerful too We don't always want to be seen with the people who are being knocked down--the poor, the differently abled, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, republicans, democrats, believers of other faiths, non-believer...and yet these are the very people that we are encouraged to associate with, the very people that Jesus said his ministry was for.

Jesus has not been giving the disciples a break lately and consequently we have not gotten much of a break the past few weeks in this constant nagging of love your neighbor, love your neighbor, love your neighbor...I mean really, what more can I say, how much more can you hear. We get it, right? Or do we?

Please understand, Jesus did not have anything against people who were successful, people who had power. Today, in the story of the banquet, just like last week's story of the rich fool, we are just being reminded that all of that success and all of that power without humility, is empty.

Will you pray with me please? May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

We join Jesus today at a dinner party. I often get the sense with this particular story that Jesus has been there for a while, enjoying a cup or two of wine watching as the guests arrive. And as they come he is treated to a wonderful dance of the front row seat, people hurrying in to nab the places of honor up by the host because each and every person coming in assumes that they are the most important person there until Jesus reminds them that they are soon going to be embarrassed because someone more important will arrive and they will be asked to get up and move to the end of the table and everyone there will witness their walk of shame.

In some ways this story may not make sense to us anymore because the art of table seating has been lost. Where you sit and who you sit by is not a big deal for most of us any more so what exactly is the point of this story?

Well, to be perfectly honest, it really has nothing to do with where we sit at a table, and our position in life. It has everything to do with our position before God, a position that cannot be earned by good behavior or by claims to superiority over others.

It may be hard for us to get but we have to understand that in Luke's day people were having a real hard time trying to figure out who got to be included at the table. Jews and non-Jews could not even eat together and the early believers could not imagine or accept that God was including outsiders at the table of God's love. This is not just a matter of who gets the best seat but who gets any seat at all. And I hate to say it, I hesitate to ask it...have we gotten any better?

This particular scripture is not letting us off the hook and while it looks like Jesus is directing his comments to the host of the dinner he is really talking directly to us. When making up our guest lists and deciding how to share the blessings we've received, don't be strategic.... we can't decide based on who looks like they have the most needs, or who will thank us the best. We cannot invite people in based on what we feel we should get back, never expect to be paid back but in all things Be extravagantly, forgetfully generous. Invite the most unlikely, most unexpected of guests into your home and "You will be blessed," Jesus says, repaid at the resurrection, for sure, but we sense that he's referring to more immediate blessings as well.

And we need to pay attention to this; we cannot for one-minute think that this does not mean us. I think we have domesticated hospitality, shaped a kind of ecosystem of inviting that keeps the welcome circulating among our own "kind" of people, or at least those we can feel comfortable around. Our generosity toward strangers and all those we might consider "strange" is often offered from a distance, without personal contact. But we're reminded that love doesn't mean "love your own family and friends," but love the stranger in your midst.

Jesus challenges us to open our eyes and see who is getting pushed around, who is being pushed out and who can we include? You, We, have to think hard about this one...who would we find it hard to invite in and not just invite in, but sit down and have a cup of coffee and a conversation with? And we have to think beyond just church on Sunday morning, but into our lives as well.

Today is communion Sunday, and the idea of the open table follows us here, this table that welcomes all of God's children to be fed by the grace of God. Is it any wonder, then, that here, at this table, this sacred space, whether fully decked out in all of its finery or a plainly laid, whether in a fully furnished Sanctuary or a basement or a hospital room, or a living room, a kitchen or any number of places where two or three are gathered that people are deeply moved, lives are changed, and we catch a glimpse of the reign of God all at this table, this table that needs no prior reservation, has no dress code and has unlimited seating?

This time, this moment we can be the Church at its best, whether the bread and the cup are passed from hand to hand or we come humbly forward to receive, THIS here is Church when we don't just remember the grace and the love that is given so freely. It is not just a memory it is the RECEIVING of that same grace and love...you can't just remember; you need to be open to receive. If you're not open to receive that would kind of be like going to your favorite restaurant and looking at the menu and remembering all of your favorite things to eat but not being able to order any of it...the meal is no good if you don't receive it.

And remember, at this table, at this extravagantly open table we don't have to deserve anything in order to share it, we don't have to be worthy in order to share it, we don't have to be sinless in order to share it, we don't have to believe in order to share it...we just have to be hungry, hungry for all that this feast is ready to give and we have to come in and set ourselves at the end of the table ready and willing to put others first, to keep making room for the children of God to keep on loving God and loving neighbors and practice humble and extravagant welcome. It begins at an open table and it extends to an open church, to open lives, to open hearts. The table is set, there is plenty of room. Let's eat. Hallelujah! Amen.