

Sermon Notes Jeff Greathouse August 28th, 2022

Sermon Text: Luke 14:1, 7-14

Jesus receives a dinner invite and he says YES.

This is one of the weeks that I am not a full fan of the lectionary. Now, don't get me wrong, I love the story that we are given. However, we are not really given the full story. Thus, this morning I want to share the full context of the story before I zero in on the story that we are given in today's lectionary.

When we take a look at the full scope of Luke 14, we see that Jesus teaches in three ways. In Luke 14:1-6, it begins with another Sabbath healing and a teaching moment about life and sabbath. Then in verses 7-14 which we read today, we see Jesus teaching through a parable on dinner invitations; which we will dive deep into and then in verses 15-24, Jesus teaches them a new parable on the Great Dinner and who is invited and who accepts and who declines and their reasons for doing so.

Now, let us engage with the story at hand. I want to lift up the Pharisees as we begin. It seems like they get thrown under the bus quite a bit. But, we can see from this text that they continued to hang around Jesus and invite him into their life. Now, some will say that they only did this to "catch him". However, let us take a look at it from their point of view. They were active in Judaism and they were extremely dedicated and committed to interpreting the laws of the Torah. They were students who simply wanted to understand God's intention for God's people. We may also want to remember that they were the ones who warned Jesus about Herod's desire to question him.

One of those laws that troubled them was how Jesus interpreted the law regarding the Sabbath. Thus, them having this meal on the Sabbath may not truly be a surprise. They were both curious and concerned on how Jesus was interpreting the Sabbath and who could or could not be at the table. On this day, he would not disappoint. At the end, they would know how Jesus interested the law and how he lived out the law.

If you are counting, this is the third dining story.

The Pharisees are watching closely.

But, Jesus may even be watching them more closely.

Jesus is paying close to attention to where everyone is sitting. Their placement at the table shows where they believe their worth is located at in this circle of friends. These individuals with bold audacity select places of honor for themselves and do not consider others who might be more distinguished.

Now, if you did not know, the tables would have been set up in a U-Shape and the shape defined the social order. The closeness of your place to the middle of the U indicated your importance to the host. If you were seated at the end of the table; there was no doubt where your social order in society would be.

So, Jesus watches the crowd and sees how they jockey for their position at the table. When we listen into the parable; it is very important for us to remember that the listeners would be very keen to the teaching that he is setting up. Their minds would automatically be drawn to the passage in Proverbs that states:

Don't work yourself into the spotlight; don't push your way into the place of prominence. It's better to be promoted to a place of honor than face humiliation by being demoted.

I think that the words that would have really stood out to them was his moral teaching where he states: "for all who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Jesus is simply inviting the hearers to rethink their places at the table and imagine new ways of being in relation to those with whom they share a meal with.

In our bible study on Tuesday, we shared about the stories that we are familiar with where the humble became exalted. Our conversation then shifted when we began talking about where we are when we are around the table and realized that Jesus was sharing a whole new approach to hospitality.

The majority of the teaching seemed to be geared around inviting individuals to the table who could not possibly pay you back. This can be seen time and time again throughout the Gospel of Luke. There is a four-fold list that is repeated in Mary's Song. The four include the poor, crippled, lame and blind. Many times, I think that we fall into a comfort-zone place of making donations or giving food to the stranger. But, I think that Jesus had more in mind. Jesus encouraged his disciples and now us to eat and interact with those humbled by life's circumstances.

As I was preparing for this sermon and thinking about my life and the churches that I have served; there were three ministries or communities that leaned into this way of life. Now, I will be upfront and honest with you that it was not always smooth sailing and there were many individuals who opposed us spending time and money in this area.

When we were in Ohio, we did a ministry called DZ@6. We put on a great meal for the downtown community. Following the meal, we had a 3-minute intermission for those who wanted to exit and then began a worship service. One year, many parents with younger kids were coming and we had children time with them following the meal. But, the greatest component of the food ministry was the church members sitting at a table and sharing a meal with individuals that they normally would not even come into contact with.

When we were in Indiana, the high school youth of our church connected with a ministry called "Meet Me Under the Bridge". Meet Me Under the Bridge, Inc. is a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that helps feed and clothe homeless people living under the bridges, along with sharing the love of Jesus in word and deed. Their mission was/is to feed the hungry (homeless) physically, mentally, spiritually and empower people at risk to achieve a healthy and self-sufficient life with spiritual wholeness.

The first time that we went there, we had a handful of students who were courageous enough to go meet individuals who lived under the bridge and feed them. While we were there, the organization was about to borrow a building to do the meals. The church slowly began to step up and Stacey helped create miracles as we had about 100 individuals who donated food, cooked food, transported food and then the miracle of families going there together to serve AND part of their time there was sitting at a table having a late lunch with individuals who were living on the street. High school students from one of the most affluent cities in Indiana sitting with the homeless sharing a meal. Even though we made great strides; many individuals in the church thought this was too dangerous and that we should not be spending money in this area of the city.

The third story comes from Southwest Minnesota. Well, actually, it comes from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The Banquet is a feeding ministry providing 16 warm, nutritious meals to the most vulnerable people in their community. All meals are cooked, served, and paid for by volunteer groups. All are welcome to join in food and fellowship at The Banquet. When we were living in Southwest Minnesota, I helped take three groups over on multiple occasions. We would take about 25 individuals over and would serve and sit with 300+ individuals at each meal.

In each of these ministries, I believe the individuals that took the risk and participated in these ministries received a foretaste of the feast that is to come at God's inclusive banquet of heaven.

In the past, there have been meals and serving occurring at Bay View. Is there room and a place for us to re-engage with that ministry?

Is the story that Jesus sharing and his words on table etiquette stirring up something in our community?

On Wednesday's, we as a church community take a look at the second reading. The second reading, once again, is from Hebrews and the writer reminds them to show hospitality to the strangers, to remember those in prison, and to focus not on wealth but to be happy with what we have.

Let me close by sharing with you verse 15, which was not included in our reading. It simply states, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God." Friends, I want to encourage you to live out our baptismal promise of "*hearing the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper.*" May we leave here today with this question in our heart and mind: How are we changed as we break bread and share in conversation with those whom Jesus invites to our table. **AMEN**