

Luke 14:1, 7-14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

7 When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 8 “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9 and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. 10 But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11 For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

12 He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

## THE TEST

A leader of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal on the Sabbath. But, this would not be a relaxing dining experience. This was a test.

The Scripture tells us that the religious leaders were watching Jesus closely. In other words they were waiting for Jesus to make a mistake. Maybe he would do something foolish. Perhaps he would once again heal on the Sabbath.

Jesus did not disappoint.

In the verses that are left out by the lectionary we learn that Jesus did indeed heal on the Sabbath ... again.

A man with dropsy appears at the meal.

Dropsy was a term used in the ancient world that referred to excessive fluid in the body. The man’s appearance suggested a grave disorder of the heart or kidneys.

This guy was literally on his last legs.

But, before Jesus healed the man, he had a question for these folks who were watching him. He asked,

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

They didn't answer. They wanted to give Jesus enough rope to hang himself.

In fact I wonder if it wasn't a setup. I wonder if the religious leaders deliberately had the sick man show up at the meal. If Jesus healed him on the Sabbath, there would be witnesses. They could successfully accuse Jesus of breaking the law.

But, Jesus was not deterred by their hardhearted ways.

Jesus healed the man, sent him away and then asked these critical watchers another question,

“If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?”

The answer was obvious. Of course they would save their ox or their son. But, they still kept quiet.

They would continue to watch Jesus closely with an eye toward judging him. Surely he would slip up soon, and they would be ready to pounce.

#### TABLE MANNERS

But, while these guys were watching Jesus, Jesus was returning the favor. Jesus was watching them.

Jesus said,

“I've been watching you, and I just couldn't help but notice that you guys tried to get the best seats, the seats of honor at the table. Didn't your Mama teach you any manners?”

Let me tell you a parable, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

A man gave a great wedding feast and invited people from all over. One of the guests was assured of his importance and went quickly to the seat of honor, right next to the host.

As the guests assembled a second man who felt simply honored just to be invited, stopped at the chair farthest from the host.

When the host took his place and looked about the table he instructed the man at the first chair to exchange places with the man on the last chair. In humiliation he did so.

That's what the kingdom of God is going to be like. The first will be last and the last will be first. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

## THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

This parable was a parable of judgment against the religious leaders.

They had interpreted the law in a very narrow way, especially when it came to the Sabbath. And Jesus said that these guys didn't have the authority to make those judgments.

The Sabbath was God's day. God would say what can happen and what cannot happen on the Sabbath just as God will assign the seats of honor on that last day.

We shouldn't assume to know the mind of God. When we come to that final wedding feast, it is God who will judge. And God's standards will be much different from our standards.

Indeed in God's kingdom the world's standards will be turned upside down. Jesus told the host of this Sabbath brunch,

“When you invite someone to a Sabbath meal at your home, don't invite your friends and relatives and those rich guys over there that can pay you back.

Instead, invite the poor, the lame, the crippled and the blind. And you will be blessed for this. They won't be able to repay you. But, when God's kingdom comes, you will be repaid.”

## GOD'S DREAM FOR THE WORLD

Now we need to understand what Jesus is doing. Jesus is painting a picture of the coming Kingdom. It's similar to what Martin Luther King did in his “I Have a Dream” speech.

We hold up a vision of what God wants for the world over against what is actually happening in the world.

In a world where everyone is struggling for the best seat in the house, pushing and shoving in a race to the top, God has a different vision.

In God's vision no child is left behind.

Those who are poor, those who are blind, and those who are broken by life are not only invited to the table; they are given the seat of honor.

I think it's wonderful that the church helps those who can't help themselves. But, this passage suggests something even greater.

In this case the broken people of the world do not become objects of charity.

They are invited to dinner. They are invited to become a part of our lives.

I love what our church has been doing at Thanksgiving these past few years.

We eat Thanksgiving dinner together and we invite everyone. That's what the kingdom is all about.

In the gospels Jesus is always going to dinner with someone. He goes to dinner with sinners and tax collectors. He goes to dinner with religious and political leaders. He attends a wedding and even makes wine to liven up the party.

In the Bible Jesus never passes up an opportunity for a meal.

In fact he was even criticized for this by his enemies. They referred to him as glutton and wine bibber.

But, the critics missed the point.

It was always about more than the food and the wine. It was always about more than the laughter and the good times.

It was always about more than the "schmoozing" and the unofficial business that is often done over a meal.

It was about a dream.

It was about the dream of God's future. It was about the world as God had reimaged it.

It was about the new creation.

It was about the Kingdom that comes.

It was about God's will being done.

## COMMUNION

We talk about that dream on the first Sunday of each month. It's that important. We can't afford to forget this dream because this dream guides us every day.

You know this dream. I bet many of you have the words memorized.

People will come from all over.

People will come from the East and the West. People will come from the North and the South.

Why will they come?

They will come for a party, a party to end all parties. They will come to sit at table in God's kingdom.

This is not a party that we give.  
This is a party that God gives.

And the host of this party is none other than Jesus himself.

And Jesus invites those who trust in him to share the feast that he has prepared.

#### SERVED BY THE LORD

The world believes that salvation is assured by hard work and righteousness. We are taught from an early age to believe that we earn our place at the table.

But, the Bible tells a different story.

Our place at the table is given to us by the grace of God. At the table Jesus serves us. At the table we remember that Jesus even died for our sins on the cross.

In John's account of the Last Supper an awkward silence settled over the disciples that night.

You see the disciples needed to wash their feet before they reclined around the table. Usually this menial job fell to the one who was the least in the group.

But, on this night no one wanted to take that role. They were busy arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom that was coming.

Have you ever been in a situation where everyone is mad and proud and no one wants to give an inch?

I have. In situations like that I'm in no mood to serve anyone. I would say, "If they want their dirty feet washed, let them do it themselves."

But, Jesus didn't do that. The Son of God, the one who really was the greatest took the role of a servant. He didn't do it out of weakness. He did it out of strength.

Jesus, knowing that he came from God and was going to God, got up from the table, laid aside his garment, wrapped himself in a towel, and proceeded to deal with the dirt.

Despite their protests Jesus did what the others would not do.

This was the message that night. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for all.

And Jesus said this was also an example of what it means to be his disciple.

It's not about prestige and deciding who is the greatest.

It's about service in his name.

#### A MEAL FOR ALL PEOPLE

I think there's a reason the image of a banquet, a meal with invited guests is so important in the New Testament. Nowhere are social boundaries so rigorously enforced than at the dinner table.

Think about those political fundraisers.

Quite often they take the form of huge banquets at which the candidate speaks. Now, whom do they invite to these important meals?

Do they invite those who can't repay them? I don't think so.

These are a thousand dollar a plate black tie dinners. In order to get in you need to have connections as well as money.

That's the way power works in our society. If you want to get elected you have to spend time with those who have the financial means to further your career.

But, today Jesus tells a bunch of religious politicians who are enamored with their own importance,

“This is not the way God's kingdom works. In God's kingdom the poor, the crippled and the blind are the first to get an invitation.”

In Jesus world (just as it is in our world) those were the folks who were most often left off the guest list.

In fact the religious elite even developed a theology that said these broken people got what they deserved.

They were broken because God had judged them. They were broken because they hadn't worked hard enough.

#### A MEAL FOR BROKEN PEOPLE LIKE US

But, I wonder how we would look at things if we recognized that all of us are broken? All of us are broken. All of us in one way or another are poor, crippled, lame and blind.

The Bible tells us that before God our righteousness is like filthy rags. The Bible tells us that we are all beggars when it comes to God's kingdom.

We come to God's table without hope save in the grace of our Lord and Savior.

We come to God's table with hands that are empty.

In some churches this is the way that communion is received. The members come forward, kneel at an altar rail and open their hands so that the communion wafer may be placed in them.

This is symbolic of how all of us must come to the Lord's Table.

We may be able, accomplished people. We may have many things that we cling to and love.

But, when we come to the Lord's Table our hands are empty. We have nothing to commend us. We only have the hope that God will give us what we need.

And God does give us what we need. God fills our empty hands with the bread of life. God gives us an abundance that is not based upon achievement but upon grace.

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

I once heard someone describe evangelism as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. I like that description because it doesn't put one person over another person in a haughty or arrogant way.

There's none of this "I have it but you don't mentality."

Instead, out of a deep sense of humility, gratitude and love we invite others to come to the feast that God in Christ has prepared.

#### NO RESERVED SEATING

In the early church the Lord's Supper was more like a potluck supper than a symbolic meal. They ate a common meal. They shared what they had with each other.

And the early church grew like wildfire.

People from all walks of life joined the church. In the early church no distinction was made between Jew and Greek, slave or free, male or female. They were all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

This community of faith was a sign of the coming kingdom. This community of faith was an example of what God was doing in the world.

And that's still true. That's why we're here today.

As we come to the Lord's Table I would remind you that there is no reserved seating. It's a come as you are affair. We all come as sinners, dressed in our filthy rags.

But, still we come, just as we are.

There is room for all at this table. There is room for the poor. There is room for the blind. There is room for the crippled.

And that pretty much includes all of us in one way or another.

But, in our broken and blind state we come together and eat this meal.

And something amazing happens.

Tears are replaced with joy and gratitude. And we have hope.

We have hope not only for this life but also for the life to come.

Amen.