

Pastor's Devotional
March 11, 2018
Luke 14:7-24

Jesus used real-life situations to illustrate how God's reign takes shape in ordinary life. Since sharing meals had great significance in Jewish life, Jesus found spiritual significance in how disciples handle dinner etiquette. I've inserted two passages from Luke 14 to save you time. (My comments are still less than a page:-)

⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, Jesus told them this parable: ⁸ "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹ For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." ¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Jesus made these comments while eating in the house of a prominent Pharisee. After challenging those gathered not to scramble for places of honor, Jesus encouraged his host to consider inviting unlikely people to his next social engagement. Instead of only hosting people he likes or owes a social obligation, a host who wants to demonstrate God's reign should invite people who don't get invited to banquets: "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind." Such generous humility would be a sign that the reign of God is advancing on earth.

Jesus' strange (and seemingly rude) proclamations were probably met with awkward silence. When Jesus paused, a fellow guest at the table tried to change the subject:

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

The Jews believed that when the Messiah came, he would destroy evil and inaugurate God's reign—bring heaven to earth! From scriptures like Psalm 25:6-9, we know that ancient Jews envisioned heaven as a huge banquet feast. The pious man tried to change the subject by declaring the obvious: "Blessed are people who get to sit at God's feast." The usual response was a loud "Amen!" But seeing that many religious people were rejecting his Messiahship, Jesus warned them with a parable.

¹⁶ Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

¹⁸ "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

¹⁹ "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

²⁰ "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

²¹ *“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’*

²² *“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’*

²³ *“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”*

Parables are scenarios from ordinary life. Jesus introduced unexpected details to make a point about the surprising nature of God’s reign. **Pause and consider, in this Parable of the Great Banquet, what seems strange to you?** (If in a group, pause to discuss what you noticed).

We’re not surprised that people make excuses not to come to our dinner parties—we’ve done it and people have done it to us. But you are correct if you thought that the excuses in the parable are ridiculous. Anyone in a village who got an invitation to a great banquet would clear their calendar. A buyer of land or oxen would check either out before agreeing to a purchase. No one would schedule a banquet to overlap with a wedding banquet. These lame excuses barely concealed contempt for the gracious host.

The host was angry, yet he was determined to throw a party. Being rejected would not squelch his gracious joy. Instead, he shared grace in shocking ways, telling his servant to bring unattractive and unpopular and villagers to his house. He even told his servant to compel total strangers to receive his generosity. He just wanted that “my house will be full.”

Jesus was and is the Messiah who delivers the eternal feast. He told this parable to warn his fellow Jews against rejected his Father’s gift. Yet the parable also illustrates the perennial tendency for all kinds of people to give excuses for why they won’t feast with Jesus--not only irreligious Gentiles, but also Gentiles who are religious churchgoers. Both irreligious and religious people find many reasons to reject God’s reign of grace. Yet people who might seem far from God’s family will be at the table, if they have the humility to accept the invitation. God is determined to have a party, which is why He sent Jesus to embody sacrificial love.

These texts give us much to ponder. Working backwards the scripture, let’s reflect on these questions (or discuss with others):

1. What excuses do people often make nowadays as they refuse the grace of Jesus?
2. Have you said “yes” to the reign of God in your life? If you were to qualify your “yes” (like a dinner party guest who won’t fully commit), what would be your excuse?
3. When you are a host, how might following Jesus affect your invitation list?
4. When you are a guest, how could you demonstrate the grace of Jesus in your choice of where to sit or to whom you talk?