

September 1, 2019 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 14:1,7-14

When was the last time you threw a party and invited anybody and everybody who wanted to come? Most of the time party planning involves a guest list, or at the very least, a sign-up sheet if there's a covered dish or potluck involved. Much thought and effort is given into seating arrangements, menus, entertainment, and other important details. We want our friends and family to have a good time; we want our carefully planned event to be successful.

Maybe that's part of what Jesus is getting at this week. When we open our doors and throw a party, when we reach out in ministry and mission, we have to be willing to take some risks. Results aren't the point of our hospitality. Success by the world's standards isn't the proper measure. This whole discipleship thing isn't about honor, glory, reward, or prestige. And it's not a competition.

My sisters and I would have a big birthday party for her every five years starting when she turned 60. We would invite all her sisters and

brothers and their families. Now with my twin living in Ohio, my younger sister works full time, it was left to my oldest sister and me to do most of the planning and preparing. We would plan for mom to sit with her siblings. We would mix the tables with family and friends, so they could get to know each other. When the party started mom always wanted me to sit at her table. It wasn't that I was her favorite, but I was the one that cared for her. I spent a lot of time with my mom, we shopped together, we had dinner together often. Most evenings she came to my apartment just to watch her shows with me. She just didn't sit in her apartment alone. I didn't mind watching her programs, I would either cross stitch or work on a quilt. By the way, Mom and I lived in the same apartment building.

Anyways my oldest sister Barbara and I took a lot of time preparing the menu and how we would decorate the community room in my building. All Patti and Sharon had to do was come the morning of the party and help decorate.

I must share this: one-year Barbara made a big batch of her famous potato salad and I made a very large pan of mostacholli. It came time to put mine in the oven, and I did. Sometime later Barbara was going to start setting out the food and guess what? She couldn't find the potato salad but did have the pan of mostacholli. She was so mad, yelling at me, I had accidently mistaken the potato salad for the mostacholli. Oh yeah, I was cooking the potato salad. To say the least, it wasn't good. Nobody really minded not having the salad but Barbara and me. I know it takes a lot of work to make it and I was foolish not to check the pans better. We both used those large aluminum pans. So when I lifted the corner of the foil and saw white I that it was the cheese.

To say the least, I spent most of the party outside at a picnic table feeling sorry. The party was a big success, mom had a great time and now when we look back at this, Barbara has never let me touch the potato salad again.

I found this poem when researching this week's liturgy:

“Parable of the Dinner Party” by Michael Coffey

She entered the party like a caped queen
heels lifting herself up to thinner air
almost to where she wanted to be

she saw the table spread with boutique finery
charcuterie and artisanal cheeses and duck liver pate
red and white and bubbling wine for every course

she approached the gathering and saw on the far end
the out-of-fashioned, the rough handed and wrong spoken
the servants and migrants who picked the butter lettuce

on the near end she saw well-labeled suits
handbags with leather and metal clasps
that look of confidence in the eyes of the highly educated

she saw one chair near her with those of her kind
she sat and mingled and sipped wine and laughed controllably
and knew which fork to use for the appetizer

the host came and thanked her for taking the seat at this end and assured her warm voiced that someday, she too, could join him at the other end.

It is important to remember, as Luke has observed for us back in Luke 13:22, that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. And so this, and all reported encounters with religious authorities, are going to clarify and sharpen the division between Jesus' vision of right now, right here, being the time and the place for the realization of God's Kingdom, and the authorities' anxiety to keep social peace as defined and enforced by the Roman occupiers.

Thus, Jesus is not being watched closely to see what they might learn from him. He is being watched closely to assess just how much of a threat he really might be.

The ploy of inviting Jesus to dinner would draw him out of public view into the private space of the Pharisee's home and allow them to test Jesus away from the gathering, admiring crowds.

Notice that Luke reports on Jesus' inner thoughts and observations. As a low-to-no status person, Jesus would have a well-trained eye for seeing how high-status people jockey to maintain their place in the pecking order.

Luke says that Jesus is going to tell them a parable. But what actually follows is a series of teachings and instructions and is not a parable. The parable doesn't come until later.

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How to seat guests with various degrees of honor is still an etiquette nightmare for hosts. You know, who will get along with who, or if relatives are speaking to each other. Does intertwining

Notice that Jesus is not teaching that such honoring be done away with all together - that all be treated equally. Rather, in this case, he advises a strategy of deliberately and consciously living beneath one's presumed status in order to receive even greater honoring later.

Some scholars speculate that this teaching would particularly apply to Luke and his first readers as they were higher status Gentiles, and the mixed-status Christian communities would require them to live beneath their comfort zone.

The assurance here is that THE Host of hosts - God - would later recognize and honor their accepting of lower social standing.

Jesus then ups the ante with this "put your money where your mouth is" teaching.

That is, not only must higher class people temporarily accept lower status for themselves, they should also pay to extend higher class privileges to the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind - knowing full well that they will never receive reciprocal treatment in this lifetime!

Notice here that the listing: the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind - reflect those listed in Jesus' initial declaration for his ministry way back in Luke 4:18: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That word, "proclaim," has lost its real impact in our modern ears. We kind of hear it as, "make an announcement," or "send out an email to everyone." It has been translated as "Gospel," and as "Good News."

But its fuller meaning is "royal decree." Jesus is not just announcing the year of the Lord's favor. He is declaring it; enacting it; making it real; bringing it into effect, into force.

Just as Caesar then, or a modern legislature today creates new realities simply by deciding and declaring (proclaiming) them, that is exactly what Jesus does. He proclaims the year of the Lord's favor and then sets out to live it and show what it means / looks like to others.

This is what Jesus is teaching and proclaiming here. What does it look like for those with higher status / honor / privilege to live the year of the Lord's favor?