

RECEIVE THE MEAL

Maundy Thursday

Luke 14:12-24

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

¹⁵ When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” ¹⁶ But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ ¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ ²⁰ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ ²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ ²² And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ ²³ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’ (ESV)

Their huge table had been in the family for four generations. They had seven children in their family—at least for now. Two were theirs biologically; the other five came from five different nations and each had special needs. Being at dinner with them was like being in heaven. The disabilities among the kids disappeared in the sheer love around the table. When asked how they had decided to

grow their family this way and to this size, the mom said, simply, “There just always seemed to be room for one more, and I think there still is.”

The Church has grown with a similar attitude from its beginning. “There always seemed to be room for one more.” It is the same attitude we bring to the Lord’s Table. We come to feast on his presence and his forgiveness, but we also come, knowing his embrace is large and that this table invites more.

Jesus tells this parable at a banquet hosted by a leading Pharisee -- on the Sabbath. Despite the eyes watching Jesus’ every move, he boldly heals a man sick with dropsy, defending his action driven by love and making no apology for his “work” on the Sabbath. Then he comments on the guests seeking the high places at the feast, suggesting they would be wise to take the lowest places instead, as an act of humility. If this is not enough, Jesus suggests that the banquet host would be more blessed to have invited people who cannot repay him with a similar banquet, people like the poor and the disabled. If the Pharisees thought Jesus would shrink in their high-powered presence, they were mistaken.

Perhaps trying to salvage something at the event, one of the reclining guests says, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” The man’s blessing tapped into the expectation of a great banquet at the arrival of the Messiah. Isaiah foretold a feast in the new Jerusalem, on Mt. Zion: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food” (Is 25:6). That blessing provides the cue for Jesus’ parable.

Jesus tells the story of a man who sends advance invitations to many to come to his banquet. When the banquet is ready, and the second invitation goes out, his invited guests begin offering a variety of really lame excuses as to why they could not attend. Realizing he is left with many empty places, he sends a servant out to do exactly what Jesus said HIS host should do. He tells him to go out “quickly” to invite the poor and the disabled of the city to his table. Many respond to the invitation and came, but there is still room. So once again the host sends out his servant, this time to the boondocks outside the city limits, hoping for a full

house. As for those who insulted the host by excusing themselves, they would miss the banquet by their own choice and to their own loss.

With this parable Jesus was saying that the promised Messiah had arrived. The feast had begun. Israel and its leaders were given advance notice, but now, as the feast was beginning, they refused to come. Now, the same people the Pharisees saw as unclean were being welcomed into the kingdom, the people Jesus loved—the sick, the sinners, and the outcasts. Not only were they joining the feast, but the invitation would be extended to the Gentiles, too, those outside the chosen nation of Israel. As for the Pharisees who rejected Jesus and his invitation, they had excluded themselves from the feast.

On this night, we recall how Jesus, the night he was betrayed, gave us his Supper as a fulfillment of the Passover and a foretaste of the great heavenly feast to come. Past, present, and future come together in this meal. We remember his death. We receive his very presence. We look forward to the heavenly banquet. And there is more.

As we gather here, there is still time, and there is still room for more to join us. That is why this table continues to be a place of invitation. When you hear the words, “Welcome to the Lord’s Table,” those words are not meant only for you. There is a longing in our Host, and even in us, for more to join us. They will lean on his grace and grow as disciples. They will be sinners like us, broken, wounded, sick, recovering, and disabled. They will come, and we will rejoice. We must never forget them, the ones who are not here yet. We have the privilege of inviting them to this banquet, and to the bigger one still to come. The table is huge. “There just always seems to be room for one more.”

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