

15 Pentecost, Proper 17, 2019
September 1, 2019
Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC 29605

Sirach 10:12-18 Psalm 112 Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 Luke 14:1, 7-14

Topic statement: Whose table?

The food might have been good, but who could notice? The woman's contribution was set aside unacknowledged and not served. Her seat as a first time guest was at the far end of the table, away from the hosts of the meal. There was an underlying tension, culminating in "what did **you** bring?" the hostess's targeted question about a contribution she had not accepted or acknowledged. There was the tension, explained; the hosts thought that the guest had brought nothing to banquet, nor anything of value to the table.

In a first-century context, this guest went home from the banquet in shame, her worth calculated by a standard of calculated social status and reciprocity: how would each guest bring value, and how could the guests return the honor of being invited?

A question of fairly recent times is "what would Jesus do?" Jesus is acutely aware of the social practices of the day - and he appears to care nothing about them. Gloria Vanderbilt he is not. We notice in this parable, however, that Jesus does not get rid of the table seating practice, but instead works within it. "Guests," Jesus says, "come to the table with humility." Those words are not a challenge to the system but an acknowledgement that the practice exists. In such a context, Jesus says, in essence, honor yourself by taking a place of lower status ... be humble.

It is in his words to the hosts that Jesus disrupts the status quo: “Do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors,” because they can repay you. Invite to the table those with no societal value: “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” These are the shocking words from Jesus, that people with no apparent value could in fact be guests of honor. The food offered and unacknowledged did not have to be brought at all. Invite to the party those who “do not belong” in a social measured by a perceived, ego-constructed ranking. There is no honor in following such a system.

In fact, as theologian David Lose writes, “Jesus’ whole life is centered on inviting into the presence of God those who neither expect nor deserve such an invitation.” This is Jesus’ ministry, to invite us all into the presence of God: paupers, sinners, the unworthy.

We hear it from Paul today, too, in the letter to the Hebrews. “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Angels – messengers of God – are unconcerned with one’s status. Look who God chooses to do God’s work: shepherds, a teenage girl, fishermen, and outcasts.

There is a turn in the parable... we have moved from a wedding banquet to THE banquet of God’s kingdom ... who will be invited? Jesus has let us know exactly who will be invited – who we need to be inviting to the table in this life, and with whom we can be expected to be seated in everlasting life. Far beyond Vanderbilt rules of etiquette, we have moved from a table meal to the heavenly realm and back again. That sinners and the poor and unnoticed will be seated together in the presence of God is very good news for you and I. If such folks will be there ... maybe we will be there, too. Is it possible that God’s table has room for all of us?

Yes, we are here on earth, in this life, praying continually: “Our Father ... thy will be done in heaven **as on earth.**” God longs for us to bring God’s kingdom to this world, to all of God’s creation.

In the wonderful richness of God’s grace and in the saving power of Jesus Christ, you and I are invited to the feast. We call this wonderful banquet “thanksgiving, Eucharist;” *eufaristo* in Greek. The presence of Jesus at the table changes everything. So it is for us. The banquet is transformed. We are transformed by accepting Jesus’ invitation to the feast. Come humbly to the *Lord’s* Supper. Come. You matter.

Who will **we** invite to the table? You might be thinking that you don’t know anyone who is really poor, crippled, lame, or blind. Think again. Pray about it. Think theologically. We all know someone poor in spirit, poor in faith, poor in trust in God. On some days, that person might be us. Come to the table.

Do we know someone crippled by the weight of his/her troubles? Of course. Come to the banquet. You are a guest of honor.

A lame person might be the one wrestling repeatedly with questions about God, loneliness, guidance for his/her life. Trials change how we walk in this world. We know what it is to be lame. You are invited.

The blind. We might be blind not only to human suffering, but to abundance! Do we really have enough? Yes, most of us do have enough. If we have nothing else, we have the abundance of God’s love and mercy; it is poured out upon us

regardless of our circumstances. You are loved. We are God's beloved guests. See and taste that the Lord is good. There is plenty for all.

Embedded in this banquet story is this: Jesus expects us to follow his example and invite into the presence of God those who do not expect to be invited, and those who think that they do not deserve to be there/here. Bring the poor, crippled, lame, blind ... ourselves.

Feed everyone with the transforming power of Jesus the Christ. We are guests at the banquet of the Lord, each one the guest of honor, each one loved and welcome. We discover with delight that Jesus is at the head of this table, at the center of the table – is everywhere that we invite him and is the center of all that we do.

Come in, come in, and welcome the Lord. Pull up a chair, and partake of the feast.