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Luke 14:15–24

50th Message

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THE GREAT WEDDING

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

When my oldest brother got married I was only eight years old. Since I was young my role was to be the ring bearer. I was so excited. I don't really remember much about the wedding but I do remember being worried that I might get sick and miss the big event. I remember praying every night, "God, please don't let me get sick." Fortunately I didn't and was able to be a part of the grand occasion.

There is another wedding that is coming in the future and there will be a great banquet. The Scriptures call this the marriage supper of the Lamb. In the same way I didn't want to miss my brother's wedding, we do not want to miss this gala event. But instead of worrying about whether we will miss it, we are invited to live not only in anticipation of it, but also in it as a present reality.

We come this morning to the Parable of the Great Banquet, and the offertory that the choir sang, *Panis Angelicus*, was most appropriate:

Bread of the Angels
Is made bread for mankind;
Gifted bread of Heaven
Of all imaginings the end;
Oh, thing miraculous!
This body of God will nourish
The poor, the servile, and the humble.¹

The body of God nourishing the poor, the servile, and the humble captures a major theme in our text this morning. We begin in chapter 14, verse 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!" (Luke 14:15 ESV)

You might recall the context from last week's study. Jesus is dining at the house of the synagogue official; in fact this is the last time he will dine with the Pharisees. The room is filled with tension because Jesus has healed a man with dropsy on the Sabbath. And then he has told a parable about hospitality, specifically that a guest is to be humble and a host is to be generous. Jesus' wisdom was completely contrary to the prevailing customs of table fellowship and would have been just as unsettling to his hearers as his healing of people on the Sabbath.

One man at the table hears "these things" about hospitality and makes a comment. "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" The man apparently picks up on the idea of blessing from Jesus' last comment: if you invite the outcasts of society to your table, you "will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13–14).

Perhaps the man sensed the tension in the room and was trying to steer the conversation in a more positive direction or just change

the subject. But no matter his motivation the comment is directed toward the great, messianic banquet in the kingdom of God. The Pharisees all assumed they would be blessed by being at this banquet because they were pious Jews who observed Torah. However, they also assumed that the crippled, the poor, and the Gentiles would not attend. There are references in the Targum, the book of Enoch, and the Messianic Rule of the Qumran community that supported this belief.²

The Pharisees at the table would have expected Jesus to reply, "Yes, for those who keep Torah it will be a blessing." But Jesus replies with another parable that would have been hard for the Pharisees to swallow.

But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. 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.' (Luke 14:16–17)

The parable begins with a man wanting to throw a large dinner party. In Matthew's version of the parable the dinner is a wedding reception. Here is how it would work. The host selects a date and sends out an Evite to a large guest list saying that they are invited to a banquet on such and such a day. Based on the responses (we assume most said yes) he then selects the type and quantity of meat. The food is then prepared and when all is ready he sends his servant through the town informing the guests that all is ready and they are to come immediately. Today we would just send a text message.

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.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' (Luke 14:18–20)

When the servant goes out to gather the guests, "they all alike began to make excuses." In other words it was unanimous and means that the guests intended to shut down the party. The parable includes the excuses of three people, all of which are absurd.

The first man tells the servant that he has bought a field and has to go and see it. The excuse is ridiculous. Even today no one would buy a property sight unseen. If I bought a house without my wife seeing it she would shoot me. In this culture one would know everything about the land before purchasing it—does it get good sun for growing, are there fruit trees, is there a source of water? The man asks politely to be excused.

The second man tells the servant that he has bought five yoke of oxen and needs to examine or test them. The quantity of five oxen means that the man is wealthy. This excuse is also ridiculous. No one would purchase a yoke of oxen untested because if they didn't

work well together they were worthless. The man asks politely to be excused.

The third man tells the servant that he has married a wife and is busy with her. Now, this might seem like a legitimate excuse but it too is ridiculous. If indeed he got married there would have been a celebration in the village and the host would never have planned a banquet at the same time. Not only is the excuse absurd, the man is being very disrespectful of his wife by suggesting he is busy with her in the house. According to Ken Bailey the chivalry of the day required a “dignified and respectful manner of talking about one’s wife”.³ And furthermore, while the other two men ask politely to be excused, the third simply says that he cannot come. All three excuses indicate that other things are more important than the relationship with the host.

We live in a culture where we think nothing of changing our mind and not attending an event where we are expected. When you enter the reception after a wedding there is often a table with cards arranged alphabetically designating seating assignments for dinner. At the end of the evening I always notice that some of those cards remain unclaimed. Or without a second thought we send a text at the last minute saying that we can’t make the party or gathering. But in the culture of Jesus’ day, to say you would attend and then give a lame excuse why you could not, would have been extremely rude and publicly insulting to the host.

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.” And the servant said, “Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.” 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. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.” (Luke 14:21–24)

As expected the host is extremely angry. He had every right to retaliate in some way but instead he responds with grace by sending his servant out to invite the poor and crippled and blind and lame. These are the outcasts of the community, the common people. They are to come quickly because the food is ready.

The servant replies that this has been done and still there is room. So, the master instructs the servant to go beyond the community, to the highways and hedges, and invite strangers, some of whom would be beggars. The servant is told to compel people. This does not imply the use of force but rather the use of persuasion because these people would have had a hard time believing that a nobleman really wanted them as guests.

Jesus speaks to a theme that would have been very familiar to the Jews—the eschatological banquet in the future kingdom of God. Isaiah gives a preview of this banquet:

**On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,**

**and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the
earth,
for the LORD has spoken.
It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have
waited for him,
that he might save us.
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (Isaiah 25:6–9)**

The same event is described in the book of Revelation and is referred to as the marriage supper of the Lamb:

**Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude,
like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals
of thunder, crying out,**

**“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—**

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

**And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those
who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”
(Revelation 19:6–9)**

In the parable, God is the host and he is throwing a great party. The original invites go out to the Jewish leadership, who were rightfully the first to be invited. But the Jewish leaders made lame excuses and refused to attend. Jesus “came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). And so God invited the poor, crippled, blind, and lame, the outcasts of the Jewish community, those who were excluded from full participation in Jewish worship (Lev. 21:17–23). But still there was room at the table and so God went beyond the community to the Gentile nations. We might note that in the parable this task is unfinished. (Isaiah anticipates the joining of the Gentiles to the Lord when he refers not only to Jews but also foreigners and eunuchs in chapter 56:1–8.)

Jesus concludes by addressing those reclining at table—“I tell you (plural) none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.”

This is similar to what Jesus said before:

**In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when
you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in
the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people
will come from east and west, and from north and south, and
recline at table in the kingdom of God. (Luke 13:28–29).**

The Pharisees are making excuses and if they do not respond to the invitation of Jesus, they will be left out.

God is inviting one and all to an incredible banquet.

The key word in verses 1–24 of this chapter is the word invite or call. The Greek word is *kaleo* and is used eleven times, sometimes in compound. The word for church is *ekklesia*, meaning the ones who are called out. God has sent invitations through his Word and through his Son. We are not the ones who initiate the offer to

attend this banquet, but we do have to respond. God does not force or coerce us to come. If we don't accept the invitation judgment is self-imposed. God doesn't exclude anyone; rather people exclude themselves.

One commentator writes: "The two essential points in His teaching are that no man can enter the Kingdom without the invitation of God, and that no man can remain outside it but by his own deliberate choice. Man cannot save himself; but he can damn himself. And it is this latter fact that makes the preaching of Jesus so urgent."⁴

Just like the Pharisees, people make up incredible excuses for not accepting God's call. But that does not faze God, for God's house will be full. He is sending invitations to the ends of the earth. He is inviting every facet of society. There will be many surprises, for there will be some who expect to be there who will be absent. And there will many who are present that would have never expected—the broken, the crippled, and the outcasts. Of course when we sit down at the table we will realize that we too are the broken and crippled who are recipients of God's grace and mercy.

The words of Isaiah and Revelation hint at an amazing, incredible event that we do not want to miss. God is going to throw an amazing party. We might reflect on whether we believe that this party will really take place and whether we are living in anticipation of that day.

The banquet is not only a future event, but it is also a past and present reality.

When Jesus came he preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. The narrow door is the way into the kingdom of God. Jesus continually brings up the kingdom of God. He inaugurated the kingdom and lived as if it were present. This is one of the reasons that Jesus is always reclining at table with all sorts of people. He was living the banquet when he was here.

We see this truth at the last supper when he says to his disciples: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15–16). Jesus infers that the last supper was foreshadowing of what is to come.

Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist at the last supper and said "do this in remembrance of me." What do we say when we take this sacrament at church? We say, come to the table. The bread and wine are symbols of Christ's body and blood but they also encourage us to join together as the Body of Christ living out the banquet in the here and now. "The body of God will nourish the poor, the servile, and the humble."

Do you know that feasting is a spiritual discipline? We know that fasting and other practices of deprivation are spiritual practices, but feasting is as well. When we prepare a really nice meal and gather around the table with friends and strangers we are to imagine that the banquet has begun. When we eat great food we are to take our time and savor every bite instead of rushing to get done so we can get back to work. We are to open ourselves to the fullness of God and offer back to God our gratitude and gratefulness.

This is how the early church lived:

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and

generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:46–47).

God models for us how to show hospitality

Did you notice that the four groups of people mentioned in our text—poor, crippled, lame, and blind were the same four groups we saw last week when Jesus talked about being a host? God is a model for how we host. We imitate God. We host the way God hosts.

Hospitality is also a spiritual practice and is a way of living. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun defines hospitality this way: "Hospitality creates a safe, open space where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another".⁵

Scot McKnight in his book *The Jesus Creed* tells a story about a church in Lexington, KY that deeply touches me. He writes:

"High school proms are the extravagant event of the year where students divide up into social classes, display privilege, and dance the night into their dreams. Mike (a local pastor) noticed that the disabled students in the community found the traditional prom to be disprivileging and nightmarish." So this pastor and some people from his church devised a plan based on this passage to create a prom for 500 disabled students, calling it "Jesus Prom: Night of the Stars."

"Donors in the church provided tuxes and dresses and limousine services, as well as a lavish banquet and the dance. These kids might not be graceful dancers or have the quickest feet, but the joy on their faces when they experienced the Jesus Prom thrilled the hearts of Southland Christian Church and brought a little of the kingdom to Lexington."⁶

Showing hospitality to the poor and crippled of society is what the ministry of International Justice Mission does. Gary Haugen, the founder of this ministry, was in the Bay Area this week. Perhaps you heard him speak. The poor are the victims of injustice the world over—young girls enslaved in sex trafficking and people oppressed by horrible working conditions. IJM works to bring the perpetrators to justice and give people freedom and hope as a way to demonstrate God's love. We will have a chance in a few weeks to hear more about the work of IJM and how we can be involved.

God loves the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And so we are to love them too.

God's love and compassion turns our unworthiness into acceptance and joy.

Our sinfulness and shame often make us feel unworthy to sit at the table with the Lord. And so we are reluctant and shy and turn away from his presence. We want to be at the banquet but we don't think we deserve to be there and would rather sit at the children's table. But that is not what God wants. He wants us front and center. One of the most favored poems of George Herbert, "Love (III)", speaks to this issue. Imagine that you are standing before the Lord having this conversation.

LOVE (III)

by George Herbert

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
 But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything.
 "A guest," I answer'd, "worthy to be here";
 Love said, "You shall be he."
 "I, the unkind, the ungrateful? ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee."
 Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 "Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve."
 "And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"
 "My dear, then I will serve."
 "You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."
 So I did sit and eat.

*May the love of the Father and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit draw us near to the table of the
 Lord that we might be filled with his rich and abundant blessings.
 Amen*

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Panis Angelicus," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Panis_Angelicus (accessed February 18, 2014).

² For references see Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, IVP*, (Downers Grove, IL, 2008), 310–311.

³ *ibid*, 315.

⁴ Darrell Bock quoting T.W. Manson, *Luke Volume 2*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 1278.

⁵ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, IVP*, (Downers Grove, IL, 2005), 138.

⁶ Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed*, (Paraclete Press, Brewster, MA, 2004), 22–23)

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