

Our second reading comes from the gospel according to Luke, chapter 14, verses 1 and 7-14. Listen for God's word to you this day:

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, ⁹ and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

¹² He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

This is the word of God for the people of God...thanks be to God.

Have you ever approached a table at a dinner party and been uncertain about where to sit? Or, have you ever felt like you took the wrong seat when you sat before other guests at a party? Do you recall the middle or high school lunch table? Where did you sit? Were you at the table with the popular kids or did you sit with those at the edges, the ones who would look in, hoping to be included? Or, have you ever been invited to an event and thought, “how will I repay them?” or wondered if someone else will repay you after doing something nice for them? If we’re being honest we can probably see ourselves in all those situations, as the insider, as the outsider, as the recipient and as the giver. Today, through Luke, Jesus invites us to examine ourselves in the role of the one who is privileged enough to know of God’s kingdom, a way of seeing and knowing that is very different from that of the world, and to consider how we are living into that kingdom here and now.

You’ll recall about a year ago I introduced the idea to many of you that we consider the word kin-dom rather than the word kingdom when we think about what God desires to see brought forth and what Jesus was living out as an example to us. The idea of kingdom is an antiquated, hierarchical model, that misses the familial connections and interconnectedness of what God has created and what God continues to invite us into through Christ. The term kin-dom helps us to re-orient ourselves in a linear way rather than the top-down model that is inherently read into the text when we use the word kingdom. All of that is to say, that today’s text is the perfect example of where the kin-dom of God is explained by Jesus. This text shakes up our ways of thinking about the world.

In Luke we have multiple examples of Jesus at table with various groups and each time he does things that go against the social, hierarchical norms of the day. He eats with the Levites, he forgives a woman at a dinner with the pharisees, he hosts a wedding banquet where he talks about eternal life. Luke's Jesus is all about showing how the emphasis on titles and status and privilege hinder the blessing of relationship which is the emphasis of the kin-dom of God. As professor Carolyn Sharpe says, "The radical hospitality centered in Luke's theology of feasting should not be understood simply as a glimpse of God's eschatological banquet. Rather, Jesus' exhortation to host "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" constitutes a strong political challenge to the finely calibrated reciprocity governing social interactions under Roman imperialism.

Countering oppressive social and economic norms is core to the gospel as Luke presents it."¹

It's hard to emphasize how significant this call to action and flipping of roles was. We tend to read the text trying to find where we fit into it now which can be helpful but we cannot lose just how radical this type of role reversal would have been. Jesus calling for a complete elimination of social expectations. Well we know how uncomfortable talk about that can make us even today, so imagine hearing it straight from Jesus at a dinner party where you are being assigned a seat based on your privilege.

The significance of this meal taking place on the sabbath is also not lost on the original audience. Keep in mind that those gathered for sabbath meal together are actively

¹ Sharp, Carolyn J., *The Working Preacher*, August 28, 2022.

recalling their history. A history where they are the slaves, the ones being relegated to the lowest rung of social and economic life. As Sally Smith Holt points out, "If Sabbath has become an opportunity to display higher status, then it's true meaning has been lost."² Just like last week's text where Jesus healed the woman in the temple on the sabbath day, Jesus is missing no opportunity to make his point. This kin-dom he is proclaiming on behalf of God is one that looks to the heart of people, not to the heart of the institutions and systems of power.

Jesus after telling the guests to not begin taking seats based on their perceived privilege then turns his attention to the host and tells them they should not invite people who can repay them the invitation. Jesus suggests extending hospitality, offering provision, and showing care to others should come with no expectation of receiving anything in return. That should make us stop in our tracks. We recognize we receive grace and mercy and salvation from God by no effort of our own doing yet how many times have we and do we put stipulations on what we offer to others?

For the past two years the Social Justice Ministry of Grace First has been helping us learn how to do just what Jesus is asking us to do, to take down barriers of status and privilege, and to use them to build bridges with others. We spent an entire year learning about various groups that are marginalized in our society. Hearing from them about their lives, and believing their stories as they told them, and asking how we can help level the playing field, not because we expected anything in return but because we see that as how Jesus calls us to care for people. We have been intentional in considering the

² Smith Holt, Sally, 284.

barriers we unintentionally have in place that keep people from knowing Jesus through Grace First, and we have asked how we can serve the community to meet needs that are real. We have been and I hope we will continue to strive to see how God sees.

I say this every week but I don't know how else to say it, it's easy to be distracted by the world. It's easy to be distracted by the top down, hierarchical, privilege based model where titles and status have all the meaning. And, it would be one thing to be distracted by those things if we didn't follow a guy named Jesus. But, for those of us who claim freedom in Christ, who are trying to follow the life of Jesus as a model for living and as a hope for anything that might come after this life, then we have got to start taking Jesus seriously about what he asks of us. To start emphasizing compassion, and love, and grace for people without any expectation at all that we will receive compassion and love and grace in return. To start showing people by our actions that we are not interested only in our interests but in the interests of all God's children, of all of creation.

The best thing about being a church community is that we get to do this together! We get to learn, discover, live out, and question our faith together. We get to choose to use any privilege we have to be a blessing, to one another, or to strangers. And sure we'll continue to make mistakes along the way, but hopefully we can show a little grace to one another. All of this choosing to live together in community and caring for people makes us the humans we were created to be, it helps us reach potential that we alone could never reach on our own, only by the grace of God. And, we get to do these things because the host of this table has offered us the chance to be his hands and feet in the

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world. To be what the world needs in order to experience the kin-dom of God today. So the question for us is how will we be humble hosts who act without expecting something in return and how will we be humble guests who use our privilege to bless others?