

Let's have a party

Luke 14: 1-14

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. ² Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?” ⁴ But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. ⁵ Then he said to them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?” ⁶ And they could not reply to this.

⁷ 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 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.”

I bet we all have stories where we graciously received a welcome even though we couldn't return the favor. Please think of a story; I'm going to ask you later.

Our gospel passage this morning has two small teachings on hospitality, on serving and being served by others. This teachings appear nowhere else in the Gospels. This chapter starts out with Jesus attending a banquet at a Pharisee leader's house, and everybody's eyes are on him. It's the Sabbath, and so they are surely wondering if he'll heal anyone. And, of course, he does – a man with “dropsy,” which is an old-fashioned name for “edema,” or swelling; probably, here, it was a severe swelling in the feet or legs. When I was doing a little research on this, I saw some pictures that were not pleasant. Frankly, I don't imagine he was very pleasant to have around.

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Lk 14:1–14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

I wonder where this man came from? How did he come to be there? Any ideas? I suspect he sort of forced his way in because he wanted to be healed. Or perhaps he was a relative of the host or even one of the servants.

I doubt that he was invited. He's not the sort of person you'd invite if you want to impress important guests.

Notice that at first, everybody is watching Jesus. Once things settle down, we are told that Jesus is watching back. I am sure that Jesus was very aware all the time of what was going on around him, but this is one of those times where the gospel writer goes out of his way to tell us so. What Jesus sees are these guests trying to get the good seats. Have you ever experienced this?

I sometimes see this at Sacred Harp singings, where it is a bit of an honor to sit in the front row.

Jesus's first parable – he uses a wedding banquet as an example, but it could be any event – is to teach us that we should sit in the “lower” seats so that we won't get knocked down, but might get moved up. I see this often happen at singings.

This isn't a new teaching for most of us, and I suspect most of us follow it somewhat instinctively. Witness what happens with the big red chair on Sunday mornings sometimes.

The second parable – and I think it is one, not a hard-and-fast rule about parties – stretches us a bit more. It tells us to stop tit-for-tatting on parties, and to invite poor people, people who are crippled or lame, or people who are blind to our parties. What do they have in common? Basically, it's a lot harder to host a party (right, Bruce?)

I find it especially interesting that Jesus mentions people who are crippled and people who are lame in this list – are lame people crippled by their lameness? Oh, the first part of the chapter – we have a lame man at this very party! This is what Jesus is talking about. We're back to doing good on the Sabbath and bringing in kingdom values in everything we do.

Have you thought of a time where you graciously received a welcome even though we couldn't return the favor? Let's share them.

Does this parable make you feel guilty? Tales of extremes can encourage us. Like a really fast runner or a really good programmer or a really good host. It stretches us and helps us be better.

How can we be hospitable to the people in Syria?

When can we bless Barb's house?