

Lent 5
"Feast"
Luke 14:12-24

The reading: **"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.'"

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

This parable comes squarely in the middle of Luke, but I featured it at the end because it talks about the end. This parable is about attitude (no surprise there) and I am going to talk to you about attitude and about blessings and about how those blessings come. The first part of the reading is going to be the frame I'll rest the story on. Jesus tells the people around him not to give kindness (presented as a banquet or feast) to those folks who can repay your kindness. Why? Because that's what God does. What can we learn from this? Moreover, what can we learn from this in during the time of social distancing. Personally, the thought of inviting anyone and everyone from the highways and byways of society made my skin crawl *before* we had the CDC and healthcare officials telling us to stay in our homes. Now, such advice seems like sheer insanity.

It's not the banquet that is the point, though. I will talk a bit about it at the end, but it is the kindness and the lack of repayment that Jesus is emphasizing here. Jesus wants us to show our

courtesy, even our everyday common courtesy, to those who cannot return it. In his day and age, this meant hospitality. In our day and age, it means something different I'm guessing. You could probably use a casual dinner party nowadays as a way to practice what Jesus is telling you, but I'll throw some other examples out there for you to consider.

Most of our courtesies and our kindnesses, particularly towards strangers, are already one-sided enough because most of them come about during one-sided circumstances. Example: you see someone stranded on the side of the road, and you stop to help them. Maybe they need a jump, maybe a tire change, maybe a cellphone call or a ride to the nearest tow truck place. In that situation, most of you would probably pull over and oblige, and you are probably not thinking "oh, this person will repay me someday." No, you just do it, because the need is there and so are you. I think this nicely fulfills what Jesus talks about, but there's other ways to extend this.

Courtesy. What about the annoying customer who won't leave you alone? What about the relative who burns you up so bad that you can't even pick up the phone when he/she calls? What about politics, the way the political spectrum swings wildly from one extremely stupid idea to the other? Nothing is being *spent* in these situations per se, except your willingness to be empathetic, your willingness not to jump to conclusions, and your willingness to listen. In a society completely lacking in those attributes, I argue that these are ways we can stand out, particularly when we're stuck in our houses for what seems like weeks on end.

While you may not run into *people* you can exercise this on as we push further and further into isolation, you can start mentally doing it. When someone dumb says something on the news or on the Internet, instead of snorting and thinking of how dumb it is, you try to understand *why* they're saying it or what the good in it is. The explanation to the Eighth Commandment tells us to *explain everything in the kindest way*. Start there as a way of putting Jesus' rather specific advice into practice.

But that's all the practical side. What about the theology? What about the Gospel, right? We're all here to hear about God's love, where is God's love in all this "can-do" advice I've been throwing your way? Well... God tells us to exercise that love because He did it too. That's what Jesus says. Jesus takes a whole parable to remind us, rather pointedly, that God Himself does this when He saves us.

This may seem stupidly obvious, but we cannot repay God. We really cannot. Not only does God categorically own everything, but God also gives us such a priceless treasure that nothing we could ever do, say, or pay could possibly remunerate God for what He does for us. He gives us life through our parents. He gives us this earth to tame, use, master, and enjoy. He gives us family, friends, clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home..... don't make me recite the full list from the Catechism because I will do so. What Jesus tells us through this parable, though, is that God gives us salvation, He gives us heaven and eternal life, and that is a thing without price.

There are two categories of people in the parable itself. There's the original guest list, and the hastily invited. So let's call them the originals and latecomers. The originals got the invitations first, this represents Israel and all those Israel saved through its preaching. The Jews. They got the invitation first, in the Old Testament. Finally, the latecomers are the rest, who came later, from the alleys, the gutters, the ghettos, and the highways and byways. The indigent, the unwanted, the smelly, dirty, cast-off remnants of society. In a word, us. We are the latecomers, we Gentiles, because God always intended us to come in, but He intended us to come in accompanied by the originals.

What is the difference between the two? Acceptance. The originals are invited but they do not come when called. The latecomers take the invitation and come. So this isn't just a Jew-Gentile illustration either, because we know that many Jews were saved, Jesus' own disciples were mostly Jewish to name a few. This is an illustration of acceptance, belief, and attitude.

The acceptance of the invitation, in this parable, is the demonstration of faith in the inviter. You

don't haul yourself all the way to a banquet unless you think the guy throwing party is actually going to deliver on his promise. When you go to a party, there is an implicit trust there that the party will happen. That sounds silly, but that's what Jesus is dealing out here. He says that those who have faith in His master – God – trust His invitation. Those who do not refuse. Simple enough, right?

There's another dimension to this, unfortunately. Look at the excuses the folks who do not come make. They're too busy. One has to take care of his field, another his oxen, another his family. Earthly things. Important things. Things that have to be dealt with. The tension between what's important right now and what's important eternally is such a uniquely Christian problem. We are in this middle all the time, you and I, we're in the middle of it right now.

You will hear some say that we should be having church, right now. Man does not live on bread alone, and you guys are mostly risking infection by going out and getting your daily bread, your food and the things you need. Yet, here we are, far away from church and from each other. Some will condemn this, saying that we are more willing to risk ourselves for food for our body than food for our soul. The devil will say that to you. What kind of Christian are you? What kind of church are you? You aren't willing to risk sickness? Death? The martyrs died for their faith, why aren't you?

Do you see? This parable perfectly reflects that frustration of sinful living. We have things we need to do on this earth, and right now staying out of society is one of those things. Yet, those things are all supposed to take second place to the accepting of the invitation, the banquet, the feast of victory for our God, alleluia.

The Word of God is not bound, and our faith is the key difference. You have not rejected God, you embrace Him, and your faith in Him remains strong despite the circumstances. That is the difference. Jesus implores us not to reject His offer to be God's children, to enter into God's feast, and you have not. You are God's children, even if you have to be apart from God's banquet table for now,

you still hear His Word and you still believe and He still loves you.

Cultivate your hunger for that feast, dear brothers and sisters. Not just when we can get together again as church, not just when we can properly take the Lord's Supper together, but the ultimate feast of victory, heaven itself. There's some nuance to this. I don't want you to hunger for death, I want you to hunger for Christ. Hunger for a world without sin, without sickness, without fear. Hunger for the delight of knowing and seeing Christ's flesh with your eyes. Hunger for the life of the world to come, and in your hunger, remember, it is yours because Christ has given Himself to you through your faith. No matter where you are, whether you're stir-crazy, lonely, depressed, or just impatient, no matter how trapped you feel, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.