

Pentecost 12 Lectionary 22 - Sunday, August 28, 2022 Luke 14:1,7-14
Rev. Paul Sartison

A few days ago I was talking with a friend about this word where Jesus says to invite to poor and blind and injured and weak. This friend has had experience being a refugee, so she knows something firsthand about being afraid, and having to get away, and maybe being hungry and leaving behind so much and having to have so little. She also knows something about being a stranger in a new place and being alone. She talked about walking down the street in a country she had never known, and being **stared at** and being **invisible** all at the same time. As we talked more about this reading from Luke she said, “When I hear that it just gives me the shivers. Because I’ve been alone and weak and poor. We have to remember all those people who are like that.” Thinking that I had the smart final word I said, “And that’s who Jesus calls us to invite to the dinner.” But she had the smart final word and said, “When you have to live like that, that’s when you start to get to know Jesus.”

She heard this story in a different way than I heard it. Jesus says, “When you give a lunch or a dinner, or a banquet, invite the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind,” and I know that when I’ve heard this I’ve always heard it as the one who is doing the inviting. I’ve imagined myself as the host, which means I’ve imagined myself as the one who’s in charge of the guest list. So it’s sounded to me as though Jesus is saying, “Paul, don’t just hobnob with the comfortable, don’t just invite people who are just like you. Or like you think you are. Invite the people you might otherwise overlook or ignore.” Fair enough, I guess. Maybe that’s the easy way for someone who can pass for “normal” to hear it. I’m the host; the guest list is mine.

But when *my friend* heard this she heard it from the point of view of the one being invited. What she heard was, “I’ve been poor, and Jesus said to invite the poor. Jesus said to invite me. I’ve been weak, and Jesus said to invite the weak. Jesus said that I matter.” She didn’t hear instructions to the host. She listened and heard a gracious word of welcome to her, because she heard Jesus say that the ones who might be left out are actually at the top of the guest list. And she has been one of those ones.

It always seems a bit strange, what Jesus says right in the middle of all this, and maybe you noticed it already: “When you give a lunch or a dinner or a banquet, don’t invite your friends, or your brother or sister, or your relatives or your rich neighbours, in case they invite you in return, and you would be repaid.” Don’t invite anyone who might invite you in return, or repay you. You wouldn’t want that to happen, right?

How many of you have said something like this before: “I guess I owe Bruce and Kristen a dinner invitation. It’s my turn, they had me over last.” I could look around here or imagine who’s out there and hear myself saying the same thing to a few of you. I guess we owe you.

Or maybe you’ve turned it around the other way and said “I’ve had Bill over four times in the last two months and he hasn’t asked me back. Maybe I’ll just hold off until he invites me over... Or maybe he just doesn’t like me.”

I guess there’s some common courtesy in all of that, and in one way it kind of makes sense; it’s just the way we do things. But that whole way of thinking can make generosity and hospitality and kindness become deals instead of gifts;

accounts to be settled rather than the things that make life full. I'll be kind to you but then you owe me. You've been generous to me but I can't stop thinking that now I owe you. But Jesus turns it all around and says, "When you have a dinner don't invite the ones who can invite you in return and pay you back." Let generosity be generosity, and let hospitality be hospitality, and let kindness be kindness.

Jesus opens up space to live in a different kind of world, where the good gifts of life are not just for the healthy or wealthy or the comfortable or familiar. A dinner invitation is for everyone. Generosity is spread all around. So Jesus makes this promise to everyone who extends a hospitable or a generous hand: "You will be blessed because they cannot repay you." You will be blessed by being set free from the world of a bit of this for a bit of that. You will be blessed to learn that you too are invited, and welcomed, and given the gift of God's generosity...and God is not waiting to get something back in return.

And Jesus makes a place at the table for everyone who cannot return the favour or afford to give something in return.

In a few minutes we'll gather, at Christ's invitation, at the table up here. Or if you're celebrating communion at home, well...we'll still be gathering together at the big table. We'll be joining our voices with the whole communion of saints, at the **really big table** with "All the company of angels, the church on earth, and the whole host of heaven," as we'll say. Jesus invites us to this table, but Jesus does not invite us to the table in order to get an invitation in return.

Jesus invites us to the table because Jesus knows that we are hungry, and hungry people need food and drink. There is a place at the table for everyone who is hungry for their next meal, for real food and something to quench their real thirst and maybe even gladden their heart. There's a place at the table for everyone who is full or over-full, but craving a life that is more than just working hard and getting more. Jesus invites us to the table because people who long to be accepted need to have a place to belong, and you and I and we and anyone who shows up belongs at this table. Jesus invites us to the table because everyone needs to be at home, and Jesus gives us this table where we are at home, always at home. Jesus invites us to be guests together, gathered at the table with the one whose generosity is simply generosity.

Sure, we will pray to be sent out into the world, "to have our hearts turned toward those who hunger in any way," we'll say, and to love God and serve our neighbours and honour the earth. But none of that is some way of repaying God for what we've been given. Because the generosity of Jesus is just plain generosity. We're sent with that gift, to enjoy the strange wonder of not thinking that anyone owes us anything; to be set free from the endless work of making sure that the giving and receiving columns balance; to be set free from the burden of thinking that we are in charge of the guest list or that we might be left off the guest list; maybe even for a moment to see as Christ sees, to give expecting nothing in return.

So what is your story? Hungry? Rich? Full? Together? Falling apart? Losing your vision, in some symbolic way or just really not able to see? Or 20-20? You're a refugee, stuck for now in a strange place and wondering where you'll belong again? Or you live in the same place where you've lived your entire life and you still wonder where you belong? Glass half empty or glass half full, or glass just plain broken? Straight or gay or not sure or something else? Growing weaker or gaining strength? Strong in faith, free of doubt...or filled with doubt? Whatever our story, there's this banquet: a small feast here, a life lived out there, where we are always welcomed by the one who gives us life. The host calls you, me, us to the table; the really big table of communion, the table where our neighbour lives, the table of the world. Jesus is blessed to have us at the table...blessed to bless us here. AMEN.