

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 14:1, 7-14

14 On one occasion when Jesus^[a] was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.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 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 the Lord. **THANKS BE TO GOD.**

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Let mutual love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.^[a] ⁴ Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’ ⁶ So we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?’ ⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.¹⁵ Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

“A Different Kind of Party”

Well, one thing that I think we can definitely conclude from today’s scripture is that Mary and Joseph did not send Jesus to cotillion school when he was a teenager, nor was Jesus a follower of Emily Post’s columns on party etiquette. No, Jesus had different rules regarding how guests lists for parties should be established and how seating arrangements should be determined. He had very different rules, indeed. Of course, the party that Jesus was talking of inviting guests to was a pretty different kind of party than those Emily Post ever considered, or than the Pharisee who invited Jesus to his soiree ever imagined. Jesus’ party, complete with its banquet table, was a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven and the coming reign of God.

And as we’ve said before, everything having to do with the Kingdom of God, God’s way, seems to be upside down from the way the world. Jesus’ party rules were no different. They were the reversal of those that were baked into the social, religious and power structures of his day, those that were considered ways to live faithfully.¹ And I would imagine they were also very aggravating to his host and the other guests that night so long ago. According to Luke, Jesus had the reputation of breaking rules, so they were all watching him closely when he arrived....and they were watching him when he took a look around and then took over. He did what he did so well. He told them all a parable.

Let me back up a minute and review what the dinner party would have likely looked like. The tables would have been rectangular in shape and low to the ground because people reclined as they ate rather than sit up. The tables would have been set up in a U-shape, with the host assigned the seat in the middle of the head table. The guests would have scrambled to get the seats closest to the host because the closer they sat to him, the higher their status and the greater their power would have been. Persons of lesser honor and status, intentionally invited, would have been seated in a different space. Lesser quality food would have been prepared for them. Often all of this was done in a location where passersby could see. The disparities in power and

¹Katie Own Aumann. “This is Not Emily Post’s Dinner Party.” <https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/62fa70fe6615fb63399999d1/katie-owen-aumann-this-is-not-emily-posts-dinner-party>. (accessed 8-26-22)

status could be publicly bolstered consequently, the honor/shame arrangements witnessed.² As scholar Charles Campbell, says, *“Many of the dinner parties in Jesus’ time primarily functioned to make sure everyone, no matter who they were, knew his proper place and stayed in it.”*³

So, what parable did Jesus tell them? This is Eugene Peterson’s interpretation of Jesus’ words, *“‘When someone invites you to dinner, don’t take the place of honor. Somebody more important than you might have been invited by the host. And he’ll come and call you out in front of everybody. Red-faced, you’ll have to make your way to the very last table, the only place left. When you are invited to dinner, instead sit at the last place. Then when the host comes, he may very well say, ‘Friend, come up to the front.’ That will give the dinner guests something to talk about!’”* (The Message, Eugene Peterson)

Hmmmm... so, Jesus did indeed give a lesson on guest etiquette, and while it may seem that he was providing a nod toward having false humility, his intent was made evident as he concluded and looked them in the eyes (I’m sure he did that), and said, *“all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”* Yes, the Kingdom is upside down...on earth as it is in heaven. *“All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

And then, and then, Jesus addressed the host specifically and stated that the guests he should invite to a dinner party should not be the kind of people who feel entitled to be there, whose presence will elevate his own status and reputation, whom he knows will reciprocate by inviting him to their next party. Instead, his guests should be those who never get invited...the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, those who he thinks could never pay him back. *(Pause)*

*Maybe it’s because of the approaching midterm elections, but I found myself thinking, with this advice to the Pharisees, about our politicians and how so often they become beholden to lobbyists and political action committees that give them the money to run their campaigns. Power and money always concentrate at the top.*⁴ Jesus was warning the host and all who were

² Shannon Kershner. *“The Rambunctious Party Guest”* <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2016/082816.html>. (accessed 8-26-22).

³ Charles Campbell. *The Word before the Powers. An Ethic of Preaching.* (Louisville: WJKP;2002), 51-53.

⁴ Amy Starr Redwine. *“The 12th Sunday after Pentecost: Luke 14:1, 7-14”*. <https://asermonforeverysunday.com/sermons/c40-the-twelfth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-2019/>. (accessed 8-26-22).

listening that evening that they needed to go outside of their circle of influence and include those whom they thought could never express their gratitude, those who'd been pushed to the margins, those who could never buy their own influence and positions. Offering that kind of hospitality, the kind that desires only to give and expects nothing in return, says something about who and whose we are. It imitates God who extends the benefit to us, God's children, the benefit of totally undeserved mercy and love...an act that we cannot repay...except maybe to only pay it forward.⁵

Jarrett Krosoczka is a children's book author and illustrator. When he published his first book, he went back to his own elementary school to make a presentation. While there he ran into a person he recognized, and who recognized him...Jeannie, the lunch lady. As he spoke with her, she mentioned her grandkids. 'That blew my mind,' Jarrett says. 'My lunch lady had grandkids!' I'd thought she'd just lived in the cafeteria with the serving spoons. I never thought of her as a real person with a life before.'

The conversation was the inspiration for Jarrett's next book, in fact, a series of 10 graphic novels about a lunch lady who uses fish stick nunchucks to fight evil cyborg substitutes, a school bus monster, and mutant mathletes. At the end of every book, with titles like, "The Lunch Lady and the Bake Sale Bandits", or "The Lunch Lady and the Picture Day Peril", the lunch lady captures the bad guy in a hairnet and proclaims, "Justice is served".

Jarrett had no idea how much kids would love the series, and how it would transform the relationship between kids and lunchroom workers in schools across the country. Again and again, he's been told by lunch ladies that they aren't used to being treated kindly in popular culture and how grateful they are for having superheroes made in their likeness.' Jarrett has since created School Lunch Hero Day, when kids can make projects for their lunch staff, expressing their gratitude for the important work they do. And in addition, incredible examples of reciprocation are happening--like the lunch ladies in CA who are working now closely with school counselors in order that they may communicate when something seems awry with the

⁵ Amy Starr Redwine.

*kids they're keeping a closer eye on in the lines, or like the lunch ladies in KY who have created a mobile food bus to feed children in the summer because they've realized that 67% would otherwise have no mid-day meal.*⁶

OK...so it seems we need to consider who are the people in our lives who WE need invite to the party, to the banquet table of God's kingdom, God's way? Maybe it IS the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. Maybe it's the ones our society treats as invisible, the ignored, the overlooked, those marginated. Rev. Amy Redwine lists... *"the person of color who was profiled and wrongly imprisoned, the transgender person, terrified of how government policies will impact their life; the person of a different religion who is looked upon with suspicion, prejudice, or even murderous rage; the immigrant who has lived among us for decades, working hard and paying taxes and who now lives in fear of being deported; the people who hold political views so different from ours that it becomes all too easy to see them as less than."* *"A potential invitee might," she says, "even be someone who wouldn't do the same for you."*⁷

Yes, not only, can we learn from Jesus today, that in God's way, at God's party, the humble will be exalted, and the exalted will be humbled, but we learn that there is always more room at the party and everyone, everyone is invited. *"Jesus wants to just make the table bigger and bigger and bigger and he wants the party to grow louder and louder and louder. He wants to serve everyone and anyone copious amounts of God's nourishing presence and tasty grace, and does not want anyone to push back from the Table until all are stuffed full of God's love and realization of their own worthiness."*⁸ Little Jameson will come to know this as today he is baptized, as his invitation to receive the undeserved mercy and love of God is proclaimed, and as he is welcomed into the household of God... as his parents vow to help him live in response to the love, and help him pay just a bit of it forward, extending the invitation to others. So, friends, let's go to the party. We're invited, all of us. Amen.

As the congregation sings, "Baptized in water, would the "to be baptized" and his family kindly come forward?

⁶ Amy Starr Redwine.

⁷ Amy Redwine.

⁸ Shannon Kirchner