

August 28, 2022

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Message: Food is certainly essential in our own daily needs often taking for granted how easy it is to pick up almost anything we need regardless of season. In biblical times, eating was often difficult depending on seasonal availability, so it was brilliant of our biblical writers to connect food, eating, and seasons to the daily need for faith as well as using eating and banquets to teach faith lessons.

In Genesis, Abraham greets 3 mysterious guests not just with words but biscuits; In Exodus, Moses restores his hungry traveler's faith by providing God-given manna; after his brothers sold Joseph into slavery then come to him after their own crop failures, he greets them, not with scorn but with a forgiveness banquet; the prodigal father's forgiving banquet when his son returns; and the wedding at Cena when Jesus and believers become symbolic bride and groom uniting all to him in the faith forever.

Jesus brilliantly connects one's need for food and life with one's need for him. Our daily need for food to satisfy one's hunger **in life** to one's need to **take him in (believe in him)** to give us a fuller, more satisfying life. He uses food terms to describe his importance in relationship to food, "I am the bread of life, come to me and never be hungry". **Never** being hungry was irresistible. Our Holy Communion ritual celebrating him with portions of food too small to satisfy our physical needs but in spirit so ample in providing all of our spiritual needs.

Referring to our reading with the "Prominent Pharisee" inviting Jesus to his banquet, dinners or banquets back in the day given by ranking Pharisee usually invited only those who were equals. Yet at this dinner, Jesus was invited. Given the history of confrontations between many Pharisees and Jesus, why was he there? He wasn't one of them yet, he is treated as an honored guest.

Maybe since Jesus presented himself as the **Son of God**, the Pharisee thought having him there would **elevate** this Pharisee host (in his and his guest's minds) as equal to God? Or maybe this Pharisee was one of those **unopposed** to Jesus. Many were envious of his popularity; attracted by the clarity of his message offering **eternal life** by just believing in him and a few meeting him in secret **seeking salvation**.

On arriving, the question of where to sit arises. It was important to one's status to sit near the host. The problem was if Jesus was a guest of honor, where should he sit? As they jockeyed for seats, Jesus interrupts their search for seats with a **parable** of a wedding banquet.

2. In it, the guest of honor presumes his importance by taking the best seat but is told he isn't the most important and is humiliated. But, if he takes the least important seat, he will be given recognition by being offered a better seat. The moral is that if one **assumes** his own importance, he is seen as **vain**; if he takes the least important seat and is offered the better

seat, then he is **given importance**. Jesus' lesson is about how we view ourselves and treat others. It's as if Jesus wrote the Hebrews line, "Be hospitable to all".

Jesus' parable is really about how we choose to view our own importance thinking it is shared by others. It is about letting our actions and care of others reflect our true character. In short, it is better to be **given** recognition or importance by others than to assume it and be disappointed or humiliated when we discover we assumed incorrectly. In the longer view of the parable, the banquet he describes is not one particular banquet but a metaphor for **all** gatherings and all of life. His banquet is really about **the banquet of life where the host of all is God**.

Jesus's story is more about the importance of being at the banquet with everyone, not just with our friends and neighbors who we expect a return invitation to their banquet as reward, but to expect our participation in life with everyone to be rewarded only **by our righteousness**. In life, there are many banquets in which we sit with others (dinner, job, worship). It is sharing those banquets with all that results in our ultimate reward at God's table of life. At the Pharisee's dinner where one sits determined one's importance. Jesus had another rule about establishing one's importance at his Last Supper. Peter was discussing about who is the most important disciple. All knew Jesus was the host of that meal, yet Jesus asks him, "Who is the most important here, the one seated or the one who serves?"

At the Pharisee's banquet, Jesus reflects on **life's banquet** saying that its host, God expects all to be invited, the "poor, crippled, lame, and blind". **By now Luke's readers will recognize that Jesus' banquet is the FAITH, a faith that openly invites all to the table with God**. I was lucky to be invited to some of the **greatest banquets of my life** 14 years ago when I worked with volunteers helping residents recover their hurricane-damaged homes. We would gather with prominent business folks, students, and homemakers after a morning's work, gather our paper sack lunches hurriedly fixed the night before and take any seat.

3. The seat may have been a pile of 2 x 4 or stacked sheet rock for our lunch banquet when one would lift up a **prayer** thanking God for the opportunity to do the work. Those present at this banquet did expect a return invitation to return again to do more.

If we were lucky, we would all be invited to an even greater banquet on Fridays when home completions were celebrated. Volunteers from other home sites gathered with the returning homeowner sharing home-made gumbo or jambalaya out of paper bowls, all getting to know the homeowner and many talking about their next trip. Jesus wants us to think about our real need, the real banquets which we choose to go to and not about who we happen to sit next to.

The reward upon resurrection, is the thank you gift of 'thank you' from our faith's host celebrating the reward of their own righteousness. In Hebrews 14 is a line that helps us understand the reward of this work, "The one you are hospitable to, may be an angel!"