

Luke 14.1,7-14 (NLT)

One Sabbath day Jesus went to eat dinner in the home of a leader of the Pharisees, and the people were watching him closely.

**7** When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit in the seats of honor near the head of the table, he gave them this advice: **8** *“When you are invited to a wedding feast, don’t sit in the seat of honor. What if someone who is more distinguished than you has also been invited? 9 The host will come and say, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then you will be embarrassed, and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table!*

**10** *“Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, ‘Friend, we have a better place for you!’ Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. 11 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

**12** Then he turned to his host. *“When you put on a luncheon or a banquet,”* he said, *“don’t invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will invite you back, and that will be your only reward. 13 Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 Then at the resurrection of the righteous, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you.”*

The word of God for the People of God  
**Thanks be to God!**

Expanding Our Guest List  
8.28.16

Opening remarks

A number of years ago, a man (Christian Herter) was running for re-election as Governor. One day he arrived late at a barbecue. Since he’d had no breakfast or lunch, he was quite famished. As he moved through the serving line, he held out his plate and received one piece of chicken. He asked the serving lady, *“Excuse me, do you mind if I get another piece of chicken? I’m very hungry.”*

Lady: *“Sorry, I’m supposed to give one piece to each person.”*

Herter: *“But I’m starving!”*

Again she replied: *“Only one piece to a customer.”*

Now, the governor was normally a very modest man, but he decided that now was the time to use the weight of his office.

Herter: *“Madam, do you know who I am? I’m the Governor of this state?”*

Lady answered: *“Sir, do you know who I am? I’m the lady in charge of chicken. Now move along!”* (Illustrations Unlimited, James Hewett, Ed. ©1988 James S. Hewett; Tyndale House Publishers; Ch 77; #12 “Intimidation of the Great”)

Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Sometimes we think too highly of ourselves.

Jesus is invited to a Pharisee’s home. Jesus noticed that many of the guests hurried to find a seat near the head of the table.

He addressed those gathered:

*“When you are invited to a party, don’t assume you are the guest of honor. What if someone more respected has been invited and the host has to say to you: ‘Sorry, but you are in someone else’s seat.’ Imagine how embarrassing it would be for you if you are asked to find another seat.”*

*“Instead,” He suggests, ‘look for the lowest seat. That way, if you are to be in the seat of honor, you will be taken to that seat by the host, who will say to you: ‘Friend, what are you doing in this spot? We have a special seat reserved just for you!’. Then you will be honored by the other guests.”*

Sometimes we think too highly of ourselves.

“The proud will be humbled, and the humble will be honored.”

And then He addressed the host:

*“When you throw a party, don’t invite your rich friends, relatives and neighbors. They can repay you by inviting you back. Rather, invite the crippled, the lame, the blind, the poor, those who cannot possibly pay you back, and God will reward you.”*

“The proud will be humbled, and the humble will be honored.”

Whenever you’re invited to a party, a meal, a wedding or whatever, where do you sit? Some of us might look at the seating chart to find out. Sometimes, it is a free-for-all -i.e., sit where you want. Others of us might assume we can just find a good seat somewhere.

In Jesus’ day, there were some who simply assumed that they were seated at the Table of Honor - the Head Table, we might call it... only to discover that they didn’t belong there.

Sometimes we think too highly of ourselves.

In this week’s reading, Jesus addresses this way of thinking.

In essence, Jesus is saying *“Whoever you are or think you may be, seek the very lowest seat, and let others raise you where they want you to be.*

For you see, in God’s kingdom, honor is a *gift given* by someone else rather than a *right that is earned on one’s own*. (Chesser)

Not only does Jesus address our lack of humility, He also challenges our guest list as well.

You see, our guest list says a lot about us. Jesus challenges us to invite people to our banquets that no one would ever think to invite — the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Those who could not possibly pay us back.

The early church followed these words of Jesus to an interesting degree. One of the most literal interpretations of this is found in third and fourth century documents (called "Didascalia"; ca. 230, Antioch; "The Apostolic Constitutions"; ca. 380, Antioch). These collections of guidelines and liturgies include an elaborate “seating” chart, specifying who would stand where in worship and why. They both also include this very radical instruction: *“If a poor person comes into the assembly, and there are no places available, the bishop must give up his seat and let the poor person sit there.”*

The bishop's seat: the pulpit — a primary focal point along with the Communion Table. So you can imagine just how radical this was. ( Chesser dissertation, "The Teaching of Peace in Early Christian Liturgies": pages 45-47).

“The proud will be humbled, and the humble will be honored.”

So, what does this mean?

When we are invited to a feast, sit in the lowest seat. Or stand.

When we throw a party, invite those who cannot possibly invite us back.

One United Methodist congregation with a long tradition of embodying these principles is **Broadway Christian Parish** in South Bend, Indiana. This congregation continues to practice weekly Communion on Sunday mornings upstairs in their worship space and then offers a **served** meal (no soup lines) with and for “whosoever comes” from the community downstairs in its fellowship hall. Among these United Methodists, the Lord's Table leads to blessing at other tables the Lord calls them to set — a powerful ongoing witness in the heart of an inner city neighborhood. They've been doing this for thirty-four years, since 1982.

What a joy to be with all of you on this day of celebration! For 25 years, we have hosted this party as a way to celebrate! Celebrate the end of summer. Celebrate our place in God's family. Celebrate being in community with each other. This is a grand affair celebrating God's amazing love and grace freely given to ALL People.

It didn't just happen this morning. For several months a planning team has considered how to make this event one that is open and welcoming to ALL God's people.

Over the years, this has changed in different ways. It all began in 1991 when the church leaders, under the leadership of Pastor Ray Vincent, wanted to have a way to celebrate the end of summer. A menu was developed. Invitations were issued. Tables and chairs were set up. Food was prepared. And it happened. The first block party! What a wonderful gathering of folks from the downtown area churches. NO tent! Not long after that first party, tents provided shade and comfort. Entertainment has been a staple over the years, varying from individuals to groups, vocal to instrumental or both. Last year we decided to have an outdoor worship service. This year, we have added a few new features: activities for the kids (face painting, sidewalk chalk, fire truck, story time and a bounce house); health fair (BP checks, glucose screening); and as part of our desire to develop a culture of Radical Hospitality, many of our Grace Church family are wearing the same thing. This is simply to identify who is willing to assist you. Of course, not all of our servants are wearing a Grace Church shirt, and perhaps not everyone wearing a shirt is able to serve.

Our goal this year, friends, is to Expand our Guest List. While we love each other and love being together, we are also mindful that there are others in the immediate area who may not have a church home or family that loves and supports them. We are here in this downtown area, and desire to show the Love and Grace of Jesus Christ to all people, no matter who they are, what they have done, where they live, or what they believe.

It has been our desire to Invite to this party, those who cannot possibly invite us back. Now, this thought may trigger all sorts of red flags of concern to some. It may go against the grain of what we

have done in the past. It may even seem a threat to the fabric of our being. But, as I read the Gospel, I read Jesus' words to Invite those who cannot invite/pay us back.

So our challenge is to live into the Gospel.

*What would it look like for us to begin to invite the "unlikely" guests to our celebrations?*

*What difference could we, as a congregation, make in our wider community, if we began to look at everyone (ALL people) as God's children, our sisters and brothers?*

*What would it look like if we began to look for the lower seats wherever we are (in actual meals, missional encounters in the community, in daily life at work, in your families and in other organizations or settings.)?*

*Who in our community might we consider inviting to join us as part of our church family?*

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