

The story we are about to read from Luke is very similar to the story we heard last week from Luke. Like the story from last week, we are going to be reading about Jesus carrying out a healing on the Sabbath. There are actually 3 Sabbath healings recorded by Luke. We are about to read the 3rd of these Sabbath healings.

Luke 14:1-14

Blogger Debie Thomas tells a story that her father told her about his early childhood in rural India. Debie says that her grandparents were devoted members of their church, and it was often the case that elders and preachers spontaneously showed up at their home for lunch after Sunday services. Food wasn't always plentiful in those years, and cooking rice and curry over a wood stove took a lot of time.

Because the rules of hospitality in India dictated that "men of God" eat first, Debie's father and his siblings had to wait quite a while to eat on Sundays. Only when the honored guests had had their fill and left would her grandmother gather the leftovers and feed the kids.

Debie's father — being only four years old at the time — did not find this weekly arrangement pleasing. One Sunday afternoon when he was feeling especially hungry, and his mother had already chased him out of the kitchen a dozen times, he just plain lost it. Marching into the dining room where the guests were relishing their second helpings, this 4 year old stuck his little hands to his hips and yelled, "Get out! Hurry up and leave so that I can eat!" This hungry child did not like the preacher, "the honored guest," eating up all of his food.

In the story from Luke that we have read, Jesus goes to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath. Eating meals together was a really big deal. Eating a meal together was a place where one showed hospitality. The gospel writer Luke makes a big deal of Jesus eating meals. In fact, one person has said that in the gospel of Luke "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal."

In this story, we are told that it takes place on the Sabbath. We learned last week that in the Bible the Sabbath is on what day? Saturday. In this story, Jesus is the invited guest at the home of a religious leader.

While Jesus is present at this man's house a man with dropsy or a water retention problem appears in front of them. The people are watching to see how Jesus is going to handle this situation where the outcast comes in contact with the powerful. Jesus asks the leaders if he can cure on the Sabbath. They are silent for lack of courage. Jesus then heals the man with dropsy.

But then Jesus provides his listeners with something to think about. Jesus asks them, "If a child or a donkey falls into a ditch on the Sabbath do you not pull them out?" Today we may think the answer is pretty clear but during the time that Jesus taught the answer was not so clear cut. But it is clear cut for Jesus. Sabbath rules do not prevent Sabbath healing and generosity.

Jesus then notices how people are sitting with each other. There is a hierarchy of seating. There are places of honor and there are places for the rest of the people. But Jesus reverses the social status of the day which is the same social status that we observe today. Jesus says if you are invited to sit in places of honor to instead sit at the places of humility. All who exalt themselves will be humbled while those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Jesus then asks who it is that we invite to meals and show our hospitality. He lists four groups of people. We invite friends. We invite brothers and sisters. We invite other relatives. We invite our wealthy neighbors. In other words we invite people that can repay us in some way.

But Jesus gives a different list of four groups to invite to meals. Jesus says to invite the poor. Jesus says to invite the crippled. Jesus says to invite the lame. Jesus says to invite the blind. The list that Jesus gives for invitation is not the list that we would ordinarily choose as the list we would invite.

Author and pastor Tony Campolo tells a story of an experience at dinner in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, some years ago. "He was checking on mission programs that his organization carries out day in and day out in Haiti. He wanted to see how the workers were surviving emotionally and spiritually.

At the end of a long day, he was tired and "peopled out," so it was with great relief that he sat down to eat a good dinner at a French restaurant in the heart of Port-au-Prince. He was seated next to the window so he could enjoy watching the activity on the street outside.

The waiter brought a delicious looking meal and set it in front of him. Tony picked up his knife and fork and was about to dive in when he happened to look to his right. There, with their noses pressed flat against the window, staring at his food, were four children from the streets. They pressed their faces right up against the glass; they were staring at his plate of food.

The waiter, seeing his discomfort, quickly moved in and pulled down the window shade, shutting out the disturbing sight of the hungry children. The waiter then said to Tony, "Don't let them bother you. Enjoy your meal."

I know fully well this scene. I experienced it myself this past Wednesday. I was invited to attend the Charlotte Knights baseball game in downtown Charlotte. I had a meeting in Charlotte in the afternoon and then planned to go to the game and meet my sister and brother-in-law and their friends. I knew I would be getting to the game in plenty of time so I stopped by a restaurant and ordered supper and took it with me to the stadium.

Across the street from the stadium is a nice park where folks like me go to hang out. There was a Dad playing ball with his son. Some people sitting on benches and reading. Families playing in the water in the fountain. A band playing music for a large group of listeners.

As I was approaching the park with my nice meal from Outback Steakhouse I was thinking to myself, "I hope I don't encounter someone who is hungry and sees that I have a bag of food. I don't want to feel guilty and be challenged to give this food away." That happened to me one time before when I arrived at a baseball stadium with food from a church fish fry and I did not want to be inconvenienced again by someone's hunger.

As I approached the park I did notice a man lying on the grass. Was he homeless? Was he simply taking a nap after a long day of construction work on a beautiful day? If I offered him a meal would that be condescending especially if he did not need food provided to him? I don't know. I do know that I felt a sense of relief that day as no one did approach me asking for my steak sandwich or sweet potato from Outback. "Don't let them bother you. Enjoy your meal." The words from that waiter were the words that I was saying to myself.

So these words of Jesus have gotten me to thinkin' this week. Who should we have a banquet for and who should we invite? I know that there has been some conversation about reaching out to the York County Sheriff's office and honoring our police officers. I wonder what would happen if we had a banquet here at Allison Creek and invited officers from the York County Sheriff's office and we invited residents of Islamville, our Muslim neighbors, to come and eat together in our Family Life Center and we provided all of the food?

What would it be like in our Family Life Center if Christians provided the space and hospitality for white people and people of color and police officers and Christians and Muslims to enjoy table fellowship together?

A few weeks ago some of us here attended worship at Liberty Hill AMEZ Church and they shared their hospitality with a meal. That event happened because you reached out to them and invited that congregation to worship here and fellowship together here with you. They wanted to respond to your hospitality and show us their hospitality.

I wonder what would happen if we were intentional in inviting people to come and experience the Common Ground trails and track and prayer chapel who come from challenging or broken homes? I wonder what would happen? I don't know.

I wonder if these words that we have read from Jesus are challenging us to have a banquet. Who should we invite? Who should organize this banquet? Who should cook the food? I don't know. But I ask you to open up the possibility that God may be speaking to you through these words to initiate and to be a part of such a banquet.

Why is it important to host such banquets? When we have meals where we only invite certain privileged people and show them great honor then we are extending the chiasm that exists in our culture. By living this way then we push ourselves farther and farther apart from one another. More importantly, we push ourselves farther and farther apart from God.

But when we join together in table fellowship with people and flip the places of honor then we bring people closer to one another. When we flip the places of honor we bring people closer to God.

Who is God inviting you to invite to the banquet? AMEN.

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-Campolo, *Stories that Feed your Soul*. pg. 104-106 and found in sermon by Ruffner, Matthew, http://day1.org/7406-what_do_the_eyes_see

-Thomas, Debie, "Table Manners," <http://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/1070-table-manners>

-Karris, Robert, *Luke: Artist and Theologian, Luke's Passion Account as Literature*, NY, Paulist, p.47

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