

We now turn to the gospel of Luke to read a story where Jesus accepts an invitation from a Pharisee to have dinner with them. Pharisees are one of the Jewish sects that are constantly at odds with Jesus in the scriptures.

But even though he is at odds with Pharisees, Jesus continues to accept their invitations to eat with them. This reading will be the third invitation in the gospel of Luke that Jesus accepts from a Pharisee for dinner together.

In these various encounters, the Pharisees that Luke highlights all seem to believe that Jesus should not associate with certain types of people. The term “Pharisees” comes to represent any person of faith who feels that Jesus should only maintain relationships with the privileged and well connected.

But throughout his encounters Jesus presents a different model of relationships. In these relationships that Jesus lives out, privilege does not have rewards.

In this story that we are about to read, Jesus arrives at the home of this well-to-do family. While there, Jesus is going to observe how the people interact with one another. And some of us know what happens at these kinds of parties. I attend these types of parties on occasion.

Parties in nice homes and in nice locations where the people present are the successful ones in the community. Conversations center around influence and accomplishments of one another, our children, and our careers.

These types of parties are where you cover up any type of failures in your life or in your family. You certainly don’t talk about the huge fight you just had with your spouse or how your kid is making bad choices.

Read Luke 14:7-14

Many of us today in our culture believe that we are self-made. We look at whatever accomplishments we have achieved and think that we made it on our own. But if we think that we are self-made then we are just deceiving ourselves.

None of us are truly independent. We are all interconnected to others in some way. Whatever we define as our success is somehow dependent on someone else.

If you are born in this country, you have certain advantages over someone born in an impoverished country. If you are born into a family with some type of financial stability, then you have certain advantages over others who are not. Men are granted certain advantages over women in our culture and whites are granted certain privileges in our culture over people of color.

But the question for us today, is what do we do with our built-in advantages? Do we exploit these advantages for ourselves or do we use the resources we have been granted to help those who do not have what we have?

As many know, over the past few weeks Rev. Peter Breeze and his wife Alice have been visiting with us from Liberia. Rev. Breeze pastors the Christ Missionary Assembly Church in Monrovia and is connected to this congregation through the Clay Hill Graveyard in our woods. Descendants from people buried in these woods are members of his congregation.

Rev. Breeze works very hard as a pastor and as an educator in Monrovia. He is a history teacher at the local public high school in Monrovia. But even though he works many more hours than I do and more than most of us, his salary is scant compared to what many of us come to expect in our workplaces.

In fact, when he arrived here, he had not been paid for his previous three months of work as a public-school teacher because of mismanagement in the government.

Peter arrived first for a few weeks and then his wife Alice arrived about 3 weeks ago. Peter has now returned to Liberia while Alice is now in Texas visiting with her sister.

When Alice arrived, she shared about the pain in her teeth. I did not hesitate to contact Stan and Susan Sheftall, two members of this church who are dentists, to see if they could help Alice out. Stan quickly agreed to see her. Alice went to see Stan for a dental visit where she was diagnosed as needing 4 teeth removed.

Alice was then scheduled for a return visit to Stan's dental office. Stan's staff of hygienists and Stan attended to Alice's needs and pulled the four teeth. No money was exchanged for this work that Stan and the dental staff did for Alice.

Next it was determined that Alice needed to see the eye doctor. It is not uncommon for people who live near the equator to develop a film across their eyes that blur one's vision. I approached my eye doctor, Dr. Paul Burt, and asked his front desk person if Dr. Burt would see Alice.

I approached Dr. Burt with the belief that he would see Alice and not charge for his services. A few days later I was contacted by Dr. Burt's staff member and told that we could schedule Alice for a visit. She went for the visit where she received an eye examination.

Dr. Burt determined that she needed surgery which he was not qualified to perform but that eyeglasses would be a temporary solution. He arranged for her to receive glasses and took care of all her expenses.

In both cases, I asked these two people to assist Alice because I believed that they would do this for her. And I believed that they would help her out because I have witnessed how they conduct themselves in their personal and professional life. They embody what it means to humbly serve and not be enticed by the advantages of privilege.

But I also was blessed to witness another example this week of what it means to use your privilege to assist others. This week I visited with the Chris and Nicole Boyd family at Levine Children's Hospital while their foster child Ray underwent a heart procedure. Ray has hemophilia which is a genetic disorder that means he lacks proper blood clotting properties.

Prior to Ray's surgery, Nicole had to give him his treatment. What I observed was what I usually observe well trained nurses perform with patients. Nicole lovingly prepared Ray to receive a complicated injection of clotting factor which she then administered to him.

Chris and Nicole do not need to foster their three children. But they foster these three children because they are driven by the same desire that Jesus commands in this passage of scripture. Use whatever privilege you have to assist others in need.

These examples are what happens by the people of this congregation all the time. You are such incredible witnesses of people who use whatever you are given to help others in need. I see that in the teachers and counselors who give out school supplies to their students who do not have them.

I see this in you when you take your time to assist others and never make a big deal about it. I love seeing and hearing about the kind and loving things that you do for others that you just do and others don't know about it.

To be a part of this congregation is to seek to be this type of person. To be a part of this congregation is to be someone who believes in our 7 core values including the value of service. Where you are constantly being open to ways of serving others.

We do this because we are seeking to live out the discipleship that Jesus models in this story that he shares. That we use whatever privilege we have to spend our time and resources with those who may not have what we have. We give because we are followers of Jesus Christ.

Thank you so much for the ways that you witness to me of what it means to reach out and include everyone at the banquet that Jesus prepares. AMEN.

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-Given 9/1/19 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)