

June 26, 2022

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 14:15-24

“RSVP”

1. Over the past few years, as politics have gotten more divisive, one place where the discourse has hit home, literally, is at the Thanksgiving dinner table
 - a. This is not new, of course
 - i. Political differences have always been present, kept at bay maybe because the entire family didn't gather routinely
 - ii. Add to that a generational distance between the young and the old and we might have additional possible tensions
 - b. Not surprisingly, then, the strategy for most families, I imagine, is to keep the conversation away from touchy subjects
 - i. After all, there are plenty of other things to talk about, why invite trouble?
 - ii. Unfortunately this means that in some families it will feel like people are just walking on eggshells the whole time
 - c. I wonder if for some family members, it is just easier to opt out from the whole thing, to deal with differences by simply sending in their apologies
 - i. “I'm facing so much tension in my life right now, I am not going to add to it by having a fight with Uncle Charlie like last year, so I'm just not going to go this time. I'll just have a quiet, peaceful Thanksgiving”
 - ii. So, what makes a good or valid excuse? Well, that may be a challenge to be sure the excuse is credible.
 - iii. I imagine that work or health are excuses that work sometimes
 - iv. Of course, these past two Thanksgivings, COVID has made the decision for some of us: Oh, sorry grandma, I can't come to dinner because of the pandemic... We don't want to get you sick! (and I really don't want to fight with Uncle Charlie)
2. In today's passage, Jesus is offering a parable to compare the Realm of God to a huge dinner party, where the guest list was eventually completely thrown out the window
 - a. Hospitality in the Middle East was and is a very serious matter
 - i. People take it as a matter of great personal pride to be able to invite someone to their home
 - ii. They will go to great lengths to honor their guests
 - iii. And that's true no matter their relative standing in the society, so a person who is of lesser means relatively will go all out on the dinner they're offering. It is a matter of hospitality and great pride
 - b. That hosting formula turns up another notch when the person inviting people is one of relatively higher means and status
 - i. The honor of being invited to such a meal is coveted!
 - ii. That could mean you've “made it” to a higher circle of society
 - c. In the passage just before today's lesson, Jesus had been talking about hosting or going to a party
 - i. Knowing that his audience was awestruck by status, he coaches them in a counterintuitive, Realm of God perspective

- ii. When you go to a dinner, don't try to sit among the who's who, but take a less prominent seat. Otherwise, a A-list guest will bump you off and that would be really embarrassing. Wouldn't it be better if your host said: what are you doing sitting in the kid's table? Come up to the head table with me!
 - iii. Likewise Jesus said before our passage: if you throw a party, don't invite the elites, but invite those who are at the bottom. Otherwise, you'll just look like you're a power-hungry social climber who wants to invite folks JUST so they can get invited back to the nicer parties.
- d. And so that's the context for today's passage. A dinner is being organized by presumably a well-to-do person, and NO ONE comes.
 - i. Who turns down a free dinner?
 - ii. First of all, the excuses were lame, patently false <https://www.firstg.org/?p=3368>
 - 1. Sorry, I bought some land BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN IT YET?! Can't come...
 - 2. Sorry, I bought some oxen, BUT I'M GOING TO TRY THEM OUT RIGHT NOW AT DINNER TIME!? I can't come...
 - 3. Sorry, I just got married (that, by the way, was a possible excuse for not going to war... Tuck that away for now, and we'll come back to it)
 - iii. The host then gets angry. What's his revenge? Invite all the people who never get invited to anything.
 - 1. BRING IN (not invite, but BRING) the people who are living in poverty, who have a disability, basically the people on the margins.
 - 2. The slave reports: they're here, and there is still room.
 - 3. Again, tuck that away. There is still room.
 - 4. So, OK, says the host: now COMPEL (force even by threats?) anyone you meet to come in, just to the house is full.
 - iv. So, let's see: Who turns down a free dinner? Maybe someone who doesn't think it will be "free"
 - 1. I'm not siding with the guests who made up lame excuses, but I wonder if they felt like the host was going to then expect something from them
 - 2. That excuse about being married could make sense: whatever you're going to ask me to do, I won't be able to: I'm a newlywed and can't leave my beloved behind!
 - v. And we're left with people who were COMPELLED to come to the dinner
 - 1. Were they happy about it? Maybe – interesting that they weren't asked
 - 2. On the other hand, think about it this way: the host upends the regular order of the society by saying: fine, we will re-write the rules!
 - 3. From the perspective of those living in poverty or in the margins, they now have a new protector
 - 4. Accepting this invitation (coercion?) means that now they're indebted or now loyal to this host. The host is their new patron
 - 5. Which means they'll go to the host for favors (and today a meal) and the host will turn to them (hopefully in a benevolent way) for them to be his people, those who are part of his extended household

6. But let it sink in. The host chose the people on the lowest rung. He didn't go from A list to B list. The host went all the way to the XYZ list
- e. Wait a minute, you might say: if this is a parable about the Realm of God, what does this say about heaven? Maybe nothing
 - i. We think about "Kingdom" or "Realm of God" and we think heaven, but it also means the way things ought to go like HERE and NOW.
 - ii. Remember Jesus said he was ushering in the Realm of God. And we pray "Thy kingdom come."
 - iii. So this is more about today than about the sweet by and by
3. When God invites us to the party, to be a part of the Realm of God, we can't know if we're in the first seating or the second seating.
 - a. I suppose if we're invited it's the first seating, and if we're forced it's the second?
 - b. But hold that in tension rather than resolve it literally
 - c. Again, we don't know if we're in the first seating (A-list) or second seating (XYZ-list), but we are assured to be in a crowd that is PURPOSEFULLY different from the expected crowd
 - d. I would suggest that one thing to consider is that accepting God's invitation to be a part of what God and Jesus are up to means there is a responsibility attached.
 - e. No free lunch.
 - f. What do we say in response to God? How do we RSVP?
 - i. That's the rub.
 - ii. There will be food, but there will be upheaval in social norms and expectations
 - iii. There will be the support of a new patron, but we'll have to sign on to new rules
 - g. Now we're looking for options, for a way out.
 - i. Am I double booked?
 - ii. Is there another more normal party I can go to?
 - iii. Can I delay and send spies to see who actually shows up at this before making a late entrance?
 - h. To be a willing participant in the Realm of God requires that we really embrace the weirdness of Jesus and the extravagant hospitality of God
 - i. Jesus, who took a pass on being with the A-listers, and instead ate with people others would cross the street rather than pass by them on the same sidewalk
 - ii. God, who though some say has a reputation for being inflexible and vindictive, is actually a God who doesn't know when to say no when it comes to giving us another chance, when it comes to forgiving us and loving us.
 - i. But what about the original invited guests? The host says: they'll never eat my food!
 - i. Not with that attitude they won't
 - ii. But remember, the dinner table still had room after the second seating.
 - iii. This host throws a dinner every night. There will be another chance
 - iv. Want to gamble and keep turning dinner down with lamer and lamer excuses? Well, those folks don't seem to be on board with the societal changes the host is proposing
4. I can't emphasize enough how radical and upsetting the vision Jesus presented was. That was true then and it is true now, if we're not whitewashing it. To say yes to Jesus means saying yes

to a Realm of God which will threaten our preconceived notions, and which will challenge our perspectives on power, and will completely flatten the society which humans always try to make into a hierarchy. I can understand why someone would hold that RSVP in sweaty palms before dropping in the mail. To be part of this movement means turning down invitations to a lot ungodly stuff that has been trying to prevent us from saying yes to God's invite.

<https://hermeneutrix.com/2018/07/24/notes-luke-14-15-24/>

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