

Seventh Sunday of Easter - May 21, 2023

Luke 14:7–14

“New Life means we’re all invited to the banquet”

1. One time, on a flight to Mexico about 10 years ago, I found myself in First Class by mistake.
 - a. My trip had me going from Indy to O’Hare in Chicago, then to Monterrey Mexico
 - i. At the gate in Chicago, I thought I heard the desk clerk call my name
 - ii. When I went up, she said, “Mr. Martinez you’ve been upgraded to 1st Class”
 - iii. Cool! I thought, not questioning my good fortune
 - iv. Throughout the flight, I enjoyed the extra room, the complementary drinks, and dinner.
 - v. I’ll admit I felt uncomfortable only in that I felt it was too good to be true
 - b. Well, it was
 - i. Something told me to confirm my return flight when it was time to come back
 - ii. I was shocked not to find my reservation online, so I called the airline
 - iii. Their records showed I had traveled from Indy to Chicago, but then I was a “no show” in that second leg of the trip.
 - iv. I assured the agent I very much had gotten on and was in fact in Mexico
 - v. “Do you still have your boarding passes?” She asked.
 - vi. I make a habit of holding on to those until I get home, so I did. I looked, and to my surprise my boarding pass from Chicago to Monterrey had another name on it – some other F. Martinez (Fabian or something, I can’t remember).
 - vii. Since they had already checked my passport in Indy, they didn’t check it again to realize their mistake – and that I was an impostor first class passenger
 - viii. I don’t know who Fabian is, or what his problem had been getting to the airport that day and missing his flight.
 - ix. But I can assure you that if he had made it to the flight in the nick of time, and then he had tried to beep his un-upgraded boarding pass, the jig would have been up, and a pleasant flight attendant would have ushered me to my coach seat (hopefully letting me keep my drink, at least!)
2. Society in the time of Jesus had similarities to the seating chart in today’s airplanes
 - a. There were strict rules and separations among different groups of people
 - i. Think of it maybe like the Ruling Elite as being First Class, and then the merchant class being perhaps Business, and then the rest of the people being in Coach.

- ii. But one feature of their society which differs from modern air travel is:
NO UPGRADES
 - iii. If you were born in First Class, that's where you stayed.
 - iv. If you were born in Coach, well, get used to it because you're staying there.
- b. In today's parable, Jesus is telling this listeners two things:
 - i. To live with a humble attitude
 - 1. Don't sit on First Class just because a seat is open – you might get sent to coach!
 - 2. Meaning: be humble, don't exalt yourself – the trip back to coach hurts
 - ii. And the second lesson is even wider in scope
 - 1. Upset the cabin structure and scramble the seating chart
 - 2. In fact, go out of your way to dismantle the expectations altogether
 - 3. You see, back then if you threw a party, you wanted to invite the rich and powerful, so that, if they came to your party, they'd feel obligated to invite YOU to their nice home
 - a. So it wasn't out of hospitality that they invited people
 - b. They were playing a game to try to get themselves invited to the fancier parties
 - 4. But Jesus is saying: Invite those near you on the plane seating chart, or farther to the back of the plane: that way it's clear you're not inviting them only to try to get something out of the transaction.
 - iii. What we might miss in this seemingly simple or even condescending order is that it is actually a radical statement
 - 1. Jesus isn't asking them to take pity on those folks
 - 2. Jesus is saying: pull up all the seats in the plane – we're restructuring it
 - 3. Yale Professor Carolyn Sharpe writes that: "The radical hospitality centered in Luke's theology of feasting" is more than just about God's heavenly banquet, and in fact hosting the "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind... [is] a strong political challenge to the finely calibrated' system under the Romans where I'll scratch your back only if you will also scratch my back. Jesus here is "Countering oppressive social and economic norms ..."
 - 4. And, as you'd expect, those in First Class aren't going to like it.
- 3. The new life of Easter is about such shocking and unexpected changes, and such wide-ranging invitations to God's banquet

- a. Living out of Easter priorities means challenging the systems we've grown accustomed to, systems we might shrug and say "it's just the way it is" if we just happen to be sitting on the "good" part of the plane
 - b. The way Jesus lived and taught brought a flatness to their society which some found repulsive, but others found life-giving.
 - c. The notion that we are called to serve without secret agendas, that we are called not play games of status, is revolutionary, figuratively and literally.
4. The picture on the bulletin cover and on the PowerPoint was taken recently by a friend, Rev. Héctor Hernández
- a. He is currently on sabbatical, and is making the pilgrimage from France to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. He posts pictures on Facebook of his daily progress.
 - b. He's walking about a half marathon a day for about 35 days (a total of about 500 miles).
 - c. He reaches his destination today!
 - d. He often encounters fellow pilgrims from all over the world along the journey.
 - i. They accompany each other for a while.
 - ii. They share stories of their lives, their reasons for their pilgrimage.
 - iii. There is no "first class" or "coach" path. They're on the same path
 - iv. And then at the end of the day, he'll sit at table with fellow pilgrims in hostels or humble hotels, to share a meal.
 - v. They are all fatigued but hopeful.
 - vi. Here they are just fellow travelers with sore feet and humbled hearts.
 - vii. Here they are gratefully eating warm soup and bread, which to them tastes like a heavenly banquet.

Sources: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-22-3/commentary-on-luke-141-7-14-5>

