

June 21, 2026

Gospel Reading: Luke 14:15-24

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to Jesus, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” 16 Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. 17 At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is ready now.’ 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ 19 Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ 20 Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ 21 So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ 22 And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ 23 Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you, [e] none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’ ”

### **Sermon:**

#### **“Glimpses of God’s Realm: Conversation with Grant Hale”**

FELIPE: I want to invite Grant Hale to come forward to share in this podcast sermon. Grant, thanks for being willing to do this. This summer, friends, we are exploring our connection to God and to one another. And one of the ways in which we're doing that is we're inviting folk in the congregation to share a little bit about their life journey and their faith journey. So I invited Grant to share with us. So Grant, first of all, just tell us a little bit about your own faith journey. How did you come to know and believe in Jesus? How do you get to follow his teachings?

GRANT: Sure. Well, first of all, thank you for doing this this way. This is pretty special. I appreciated last week watching Amy doing that. I want to say, you know, happy Father's Day to everyone except for me because it's Amy's birthday today. So we'll start right there. You know, happy anniversary to Jan and Roger Brinkman. Saw them last night to Henry's. And happy Juneteenth and every other holiday that's going on right now. So again, thank you for doing this. I know that I'm the only thing between you and the food, so I prepared

this 90-minute sermon about my faith journey. I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. I'm totally kidding.

GRANT: No, where should I start? As a kid, raised in the Methodist Church in Indianapolis, nothing like Tracy's version of the Star Wars cantina scene of the Methodist Church. No, I was the Meridian Street United Methodist Church, not like Tracy's aliens, you know going crazy but still in the Methodist Church and that wasn't as formative as later on, it was just kind of confusing. It was fine. I hung a cross in my car when I was a teenager in high school because, you know, that was a cool thing to do. And, you know, being religious meant you're a good person. And that was kind of a foundation. It didn't really mean much. But then you get late teens, early 20s, you get real angsty and you don't know what's going on. You get confused. You know there's something in there spiritually. And I was just, I was angry. I was confused and just in a bad spot. And then, speaking of Father's Day, on my pillow in my bed the next morning was a Peace Corps brochure. And I opened it up and I read it and I was like, do something for other people. Do something for the world. Give yourself. And I was like, yeah, it's not about me. It's not about what I want and what's wrong with my life. No, no, just do something for other people and you'll be all right. So I actually joined the Peace Corps and they're like, all right, we're going to send them Mauritania. I was like, I'll go wherever you want me to. Mauritania, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Northwest Africa. I never heard of it. I Googled it, and I was like, yeah, you shouldn't go there. It's one of the poorest countries in the world. It's mostly desert. There's barely any economy, but I was like, let's go. Let's do it. So on September 11, 2000, I gave a speech at the Peace Corps headquarters in Mauritania to swear in the volunteers. I gave it in the dialect of Arabic, and then I went on three days by bush taxi to the religious leader of the village's hut, the imam, the Muslim leader of the whole village, and that's where I was going to live for two years.

GRANT: And so, speaking of the feast, you know, there wasn't much food, but he always provided, first for me, but then anyone who came, he just let them come in and share the meal. And, you know, I got frustrated because... I was so hungry. I lost almost 40 pounds in the first six months. That was not funny because there just wasn't that much food. But he just kept doing that. And I was like, why are you doing this? And I'd just get so mad. But then I realized it's like the most pure religion. That's every religion. You give what little you have to someone else, no matter how it makes everybody else think or feel. That's right. That's good. That's just. That's pure. So I was like. Great. And, you know, that on top of halfway through my stay it was the 9-11, the terrorist attacks. And here I was, this Western Christian Methodist at the time with this Muslim imam in his madrasa teaching the Koran to his orphans. You know, they took a lot of the food, too. But how do you say, no, I want the food, not the orphans? So that's life, right? No. So I guess that led to now having that experience.

But now with all the crazy, awful things are happening in the world. What did Jesus teach? I never I never fully bought into the whole. Oh, he's the son of God. I know he is. But like, really, did that happen? We didn't have cell phones. We couldn't we couldn't record them back then. I've got to take your word for it. But everything that you say, everything that Jesus taught being good, being kind, being welcoming. Do that. Be that. And so that's, you know, the world and family, teenagers at home, and yes, knowing the pure awfulness of the world. I'm just kidding. No, not because of that, but because of the way you feel when you have strife and you have desire to make people's lives better, but you can't. And then you're like, well, what's good and what's right and what's just? Well, just keep doing that. Just keep being good. Keep helping. Keep offering. So I think that's my journey. Sorry, that was a little long-winded.

FELIPE: Not at all. Not at all. I'm interested in when you were living with the imam. A couple of things. One is you experienced hospitality in a way that we in the Western world may not experience. And you gave us some clues already about that. And the other part is... I wonder what it was like to live with a leader of another religion, albeit connected to Christianity and Judaism, Islam is. But I wonder what you learned about hospitality and what you learned about faith.

GRANT: Yeah, Islam, similar to Christianity, monotheistic, one of the major religions of the world, but still very different. But that same teaching of generosity and hospitality and giving, and being good and kind, that's there. And that hospitality, when you have so little, it meant that much more. I saw, Usman was his name, I saw him be that generous with so little, and I thought, that's putting your money where your mouth is. You can say you're religious, you can act religious, but when you do it, that's real, that's pure. And I saw his version of Islam. I saw him pray five times a day, every day, no matter what. and fast during Ramadan. That was the other thing. Not being able to eat during Ramadan.

FELIPE: Did you also fast?

GRANT: Well, yeah. He said, you're not Muslim, so you can have lunch. I said, what's for lunch? He's like, there is no lunch. So I just had to wait. So yeah, I did really come to learn and appreciate Islam and him and how that's how you be religious. And he did. I was close. I was close to converting. He was like, yeah, you should be a Muslim.

FELIPE: Oh, he was working on you.

GRANT: Oh, yeah. The whole two years. But, no, I stuck with my faith journey and came home and almost extended a year. But, no, it was pretty crazy in 2002 after 9-11. So I just came back home. But still, took that, seeing him welcome every single person. Because they knew there was a, you know, a westerner living there maybe there's some funding that

could get more food they could get more resources and so they'd come and they'd ask for things and ask for medicine and ask for food and he never never ever turned anyone away and i i just couldn't believe that and still that's a lesson i take from that experience, that kind of hospitality.

FELIPE: I anticipated that you had experienced good hospitality I didn't know you had stayed with an imam. When i heard that i thought I bet you experienced hospitality with him And then I thought of the passage that we were having for today and about the fact that we were having the picnic today. And an idea came to me that maybe the banquet that God prepares is way bigger than we even imagine. And in fact, I think that's what the story is about. The story is about saying the banquet is bigger. The realm of God is bigger than you can ever imagine. But I never thought about how that connects with people of other faiths. Like, I believe in interfaith work. I believe that God's love is bigger than I can imagine. This particular story, I had never seen through that lens. So I wonder, Grant, having had the experience there that you did, and maybe other experiences you have had with people from other faiths, what does interfaith work look like or feel like or has felt like for you?

GRANT: That's a good question. It's a good takeaway from that whole that whole thing i take that for granted i thought everyone just knows yeah there's these huge monotheistic religions and there's also other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism all the all the religions well who's right you know who's correct, who's got a monopoly on truth nobody but everybody we all do and and it all boils down to it gets It cuts through all the words, the words that we use and language that we use. It goes down to the spirit of it. And that's interfaith. And that's the purity of true religion is doing what you're supposed to do, doing what's good and right and kind to each other, no matter what religion, no matter what background. And that's what I didn't choose to experience, but that's what I experienced living there for two years. And I don't want to preach that, but that's... That's how it is, and that's a good thing. That's how it should be, so we should celebrate that.

FELIPE: Well, you were there in a particularly difficult time. I didn't realize until today that you were there while the attacks of 9-11 happened here back home, and here you are a Western or Christian living with an imam.

GRANT: Yes, that was also a factor. About half of the volunteers, there were 100 or so U.S. citizens in Mauritania. And we were all consolidated for security reasons in Senegal and given the option to, you know, fill out your service your remaining year or go home. And about half came home. And, you know, no judgment there. It was a very trying time. But, yeah, most people said, yeah, you're not going to stay in that Muslim country with that imam in his madrasa and learn the Koran, you know, in 9-11. You don't need to come home. I was like, no, I feel safe there. And now it's even more important. Now this is the inflection

point in society. We can divide and hate, or we can learn and understand and love, and that's what I did. Well, Grant, thank you for sharing your experience and helping us think about how we open our table just as God opens God's table.

FELIPE: Thank you. Let's thank Grant. Thank you for doing this.