

## WHO'S INVITED OR OPEN INVITATION

Luke 14:1, 7-24  
Hebrews 13:1-16

New Store/Maysville Presbyterian Churches  
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One of the notable things about the *Gospel according to Luke* is how often Jesus is either at someone's house eating a meal, or relates a teaching around the setting of a meal. In fact, *Luke* has more scenes set in or about meal-fellowship than any of the other three gospels. As someone who likes to eat and who enjoys good food, I think I've found one of the reasons the *Gospel according to Luke* is my favorite.

But it is not just about one big party – well, maybe it is – but the party about which Jesus talks and teaches is about God's party – the kingdom-party and the second of our two parables in this morning's text is about who gets invited to God's party.

Southern hospitality is famous. Not to be a conceited Southerner, but I'd say our brand of hospitality sets the standard for all of North America. Big restaurants in northern cities will sometimes send their maitre d's and managers to visit or even to work for a while in the South so as to learn and experience what those of us who grew up below the Mason-Dixon line know as true hospitality.

So some of us hear the first parable Jesus teaches at the house of a Pharisee and it sounds to us like it came from a Cotillion manual – practical advice on how to behave properly at a party:

- don't make a scene,
- don't insist on sitting at the head table,
- let your host invite you to move up as others follow.

But as with all of Jesus' parables and teachings, the moral ethic, and here, social etiquette advice is secondary to what Jesus was really saying. His "advice" is about how to behave in God's kin-dom, the kin-dom that is not in some distant future, but is here, now, made real and visible to us with Jesus' first coming and will not be completed until He comes again.

The second parable which Jesus shares while dining at someone's home is like most of His parables – truly multi-layered. Again, His sayings about a banquet sound like good advice. The stereotypical Scot, with a penchant for frugality, would agree that once you've gone to the trouble of planning a party, hiring the caterer, sending out invitations to your friends and close business associates, when the excuses come pouring in; then tell your employees and servants to bring the poor, the hungry, the crippled, the blind, and fill the banquet hall with people so as to maximize the value of the expense.

That may make for sound advice – but to many of us, it is crazy advice. Often we put ourselves in the position of the party-giver – having to deal with spending all the money for a party that almost doesn't get off the ground! And, often our initial response is – why bother with the party if our friends and associates are going to decline attending? Are we holding back from celebrating God's love because we're afraid that no one will show up? In what ways do we make it easy for our friends and neighbors to decline our invitation? And, if, or when, they do beg off, what is our response? Will we do as Jesus says in the parable and invite those people whom society deems

undesirable, the social outcasts, the emotionally ill, the physically or mentally challenged?

Maybe – or maybe not As I said, Jesus' parables are multi-layered and sometimes His teachings disguise a hard saying or two, sometimes that pricks us or prods us. Remember, every one of His parables have something important to say about God's kin-dom – not a kin-dom in heaven – that is, far away in times and space — but as we say each week while reciting the Lord's Prayer – *on earth as it [already] is in heaven.*

Yet the idea of God's kin-dom being here on earth is hard for us to conceive. When we watch the news – the violence, the terror alerts, the ongoing tragedy of slow recoveries from weather-caused disasters, the malfeasance of politicians, the rollercoaster information about the pandemic we find excuses not to celebrate the in-breaking of God's kin-dom. When we turn into our selves, keep to our own affairs, only watching out for our own interests, without seeing the larger picture, we reject the invitation from others to join in their celebration of God's kin-dom-party.

Still, I can imagine a few of you thinking – “When was I invited?” “If I had only known who was going to be at the party – then I would have gone.” When did you hold out serving in some capacity here at church because you had to know who else was going to be there before you agreed? Have you ever said to someone who is looking for help to teach a class, or help in the Nursery, or assist with the

Food Pantry, that you couldn't lend a hand because you had too much to do? Or, that you had invited guests to come for Sunday lunch and you couldn't possibly come and help at church? How about the times when new activities are getting started and the invitation goes out to everyone – do you hold back, or do you step in?

You see, there are many ways to be invited – and many ways for us to make the invitation . In fact, Jesus makes an open invitation – “Come to me, **all** you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” {Matt 11:28-30}

Both my paternal grandmother and my mother were big fans of Peter Marshall, the renowned Presbyterian minister of the 1940s and early 1950s. In his sermon on our Gospel reading this morning, he concludes with this challenge: “I wonder what would happen if we all agreed to read one of the Gospels until we came to a place that told us to do something, *then went out to do it*, and only after we had done it... began reading again? Why don't we do what Jesus says? How exciting life would become were we to begin living according to His way of life? Friends would say we had lost our minds—perhaps. Acquaintances would say we were ‘peculiar.’ Those who dislike us would say we were crazy. But Someone Else, who had these same things said about Him, would smile, and the joy and peace in our hearts would tell us who was right. There are aspects of the Gospel that are puzzling and difficult to understand. But our

problems are not centered around things we don't understand, but rather in things we do understand, *the things we could not possibly misunderstand.*"<sup>1</sup>

So, come, let us join the party-kin-dom of God; let us put on our festal clothing, let us be both guests and co-hosts of God – inviting everyone to join us. Let us not merely extend the open invitation of Jesus, but let us also follow through and welcome all who come to God's celebration of love, peace and hope, in, through, with, and as Jesus the Christ.

Let us pray: Awesome and welcoming God, we are reminded of how You invite us to come and join Your celebration. We receive this invitation with gratitude and joy. Help us to invite others to join us; those whom we find it easy to ask, and those whom we would not ordinarily invite. Help us to extend an open invitation to all and to commit ourselves to being part of Your kin-dom party, celebrating Your love and serving our Biblical neighbors, making them welcome in Your kin-dom, which comes on earth as it is in heaven. We pray in Jesus' name, who is our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Marshall, *Mr. Jones, Meet the Master*, Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1950, 128.