

Luke 14:15-24  
The Parable of the Great Banquet  
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**O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “violence!” and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous.** Habakkuk 1:2-4.

These words have been rolling around in my mind for the last few days. This week, I found myself in front of the news once again saying, “Again? How long, O Lord?” These words I just read from the prophet Habakkuk resonate with the groaning of dislocation and isolation. These jarring stories scatter and confuse, dislocating us. In our feeling of isolation, we ask, “What can I do? I’m just one person.”

Right now in Oregon, as well as Charleston, Tuscon, Newtown, Blacksburg, New York City, Columbine, and seemingly countless other cities, people in the aftermath are left with that vacant feeling, with swirling questions: Are we really helpless to change anything? Will this world continue to spiral out of control?

We cannot know what unthinkable malice took possession of this young man. But something stuck out to me as I learned more this week; on his social media pages, he had but two friends. This was a young man who was isolated, and I believe that at the root of anger was dislocation from any meaningful community. Now because of this, once again we are face the prospect of grieving more lost lives (nearly 500 since 1999). How long, O Lord?

The Scriptures speak to us not only words that comfort in times like this, but offer words of wisdom for change. I believe very strongly that healing and restoration, identity and purpose ONLY happen within the context of community, Gospel Community. The picture we are going to look at today is that of a patient and loving homeowner who issues an invitation. It’s an invitation to be a part of an extravagant feast.

**When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and**

**compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.”**

Eating dinner in ancient Israel was a big deal, not necessarily because of the food that was prepared, but because of the people who gathered around the table. Ancient society had no notion of the nuclear family. Every time they sat at the table, it was with grandparents, parents, children, probably a widowed aunt or two. Frequently there were guests there as well, suggesting that all who were there were treated with the same level of trust as that of a family member.

If you're at the table, you're family.

In seminary, I was man without roots on the east coast. Fortunately, Kyle, my college roommate, lived a few hours south in Washington DC. Each thanksgiving I would travel with him to his family's home in the hills of West Virginia. And for that long weekend, I was treated as one of the Sheldons. I had the joy of being one of the boys around their table, on the couches for football, back at the table for card games and lots of laughter. But I learned something there: as important as receiving an invitation is the willingness to accept that invitation.

Jesus tells us about an extravagantly generous homeowner who does something remarkable. You see, he didn't just invite them to the local coffee shop to get to know them, he didn't ask them to meet him for lunch at the local deli; he invited them into his home, which meant that he wanted to know them intimately and make himself vulnerable by inviting them into his personal space. I want to know you, and I want you to know me.

Here's where the moment of decision occurs. The initial invitation has gone out, but there would be a second invitation, a call to the table. In this moment, we face a decision. Joining this meal implies deep relationship—am I willing to go all in? Am I willing to know others, and more importantly, am I willing to be known?

At no other time in human history have we been so insulated from the world around us. Thanks to modern community planning, innovation, and social media, we can almost literally never leave the house. And if we do, we pull up the garage door, drive to our destination, drive home, pull into our garage, close it behind us, and insulate ourselves in our home surrounded by technology to keep us company.

It's no wonder, as one article I read this week puts it, that the dining room is becoming extinct.

Like these guests, we make excuses why we would rather not come. Work is too hectic, we're closing a big deal, please excuse me. Our possessions are a common excuse: I just bought a new table-saw, a new tractor, a new TaylorMade Driver, please excuse me. Even our family can be an excuse.

But I think there's another excuse, one that lies just below the surface, and it has to do with how we see ourselves. You see, when we are invited to gather around the table with others, we risk the feeling of having mirrors placed before us. We risk being seen by others for who we really are. These mirrors display our shortcomings, our insecurities, our unmet hopes and dreams. We

risk comparing ourselves to others and the feeling that in some way, we got the short end of the stick. Accepting someone else's hospitality means you're not in control, and that can be scary. But the alternative, isolation and dislocation, is downright terrifying.

Jesus' parable speaks of a table that is large enough for all to find a place. It's the table of Amazing Grace. This table is welcoming and hospitable enough that you don't have to worry about "washing up" for dinner either. Do you see how after the initial guests reject his offer, the homeowner says to the servant, **'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'** Clearly he's not concerned with pearls and cufflinks. He's also not concerned about your bank account or your 401k, he's not concerned about your unresolved family issues, he's not even concerned whether or not you've prayed the sinner's prayer. At this feast, not only will you see how desperately undeserving you are, but you will know without a doubt how extravagantly loved and welcomed and lavished upon you can be.

Of course, do you see what happens at the end of this passage? Jesus says, **"For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet."** If we continue to make our excuses, we risk the chance that we'll miss out. And in these parables, Jesus issues that stern warning that there will come a time when it's too late, when you've missed your chance. So why wait? Why not say yes to God's invitation to you?

You see, it's around this table that enemies become family, that competitors become collaborators; where broken lives are healed and alienated lives comforted; where isolation gives way to community and dislocation gives way to God-breathed identity. This table is the joyful feast of the Kingdom of God, where all those who are lost can come and be found by Almighty God. And all you can do is take your seat and receive the blessing of Jesus' amazing grace.

And who wouldn't want that?

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.