

The Great Banquet — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: Luke 14:15-24

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 10-6-19

Today is World Communion Day! Christians around the world are celebrating with us today in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

There is no better text for World Communion Day than the Great Banquet as described in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 14 verses 15-24.

¹⁵ One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “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, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"ⁱ

With verse 15 we pick up in the middle of a larger scene. Jesus is at the home of a leader of the Pharisees where he is attending a dinner on the Sabbath. While there, Jesus heals a man and gives a short lecture on who gets seats of honor at a wedding banquet.

In verse 11, Jesus says, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." And in verses 13-14 Jesus further states, "¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

With those two admonishments, we come to verse 15. One could imagine there is a lull in the conversation after Jesus has spoken. And then one of the dinner guests in an attempt to possibly break the silence or to steer the conversation to a less controversial topic, says to Jesus, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

It is from this statement that Jesus begins to tell the Parable of the Great Banquet. A little background on the customs related to invitations at the time of Jesus. It was customary for the wealthy or those with status to issue two invitations for their dinner parties.

The first invitation is to get an idea of who is planning to come to the party so that an appropriate amount of food and drink can be prepared. The second invitation is when the party is all set and ready to begin. The person giving the party would send out a slave or servant to let those attending know it was time to come.

If you had agreed to come to the first invitation, it would have been an extreme insult and an embarrassment to the person giving the party to decline to come at the moment of the second invitation. Everyone listening to Jesus’ parable would have known that fact.

Another fact that those attending the dinner at the Pharisee's home would have known was that it was also customary to invite people to your dinner parties that could reciprocate. Consider it a quid pro quo – I'll invite you to my party and you then invite me to yours.

So what happens in the Parable? At the second invitation, those people invited all have excuses as to why they must decline actually showing up. The first example Jesus gives is a person who says I bought a piece of land and I must check it out. The second person says I have bought 5 oxen and I must try them out. And the third person, I've just gotten married and I want to stay home. These are lame excuses. Certainly not excuses that hold up as reasons for declining an invitation they had known about and had accepted.

The dinner host is angry. So angry that he no longer cares about expected protocols. He has a fabulous dinner planned and he intends to have people enjoy it. The Host tells his servant to go out "into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." And when there is still room left over, the host instructs the servant to "go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled."

Notice that the host says for the servant to “compel people to come.” This is because the people invited, the poor, the crippled would not have come on their own. They would have known that they could not reciprocate the hospitality of the Dinner Host. It would have taken convincing that they were really invited and really needed to come and enjoy the banquet.

Then the host pronounces that none of those who were originally invited will taste my dinner.

The parables of Jesus always have a deeper layer of meaning than just the story. So, in looking closer at the parable, what are the deeper meanings?

First, let us assume that the “someone” who gave the dinner is God. The implication is that God had previously invited the Hebrew people to his Great Banquet. God had promised the Hebrew people a messiah. And yet, at the coming of Jesus, the coming of the messiah, which marked the second invitation to God’s Great Banquet, many of those originally invited were declining God’s invitation.

Jesus is telling these people at the Pharisee’s house that God’s Kingdom is bigger than they ever thought. God’s Kingdom would include people they would never have accepted. God’s Kingdom would include the poor, the outcast, the Gentiles.

Jesus is telling the people at the Pharisee's house if they reject salvation through God's Messiah, then they will have no part in the Great Banquet of God.

God's Banquet is available to everyone.

What a message to hear on World Communion Sunday. Everyone is invited.

Regardless of color or gender or nationality, everyone is invited to share in the Feast of God.

To participate we need only to accept the invitation. Everyone is invited.

Today we will gather at God's table to join in remembering the sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We will gather here in Big Flats at God's table just as people around the world are gathering at God's table where they live.

Author Justo Gonzalez says, "In interpreting this passage, we should not forget that for its first readers (as for Christians through the ages) the central act of worship was a meal. At Communion, even though we prepare the table and invite people to participate, Jesus takes over. He is the host, and we are his guests."ⁱⁱ

Jesus has set the table and ALL are invited to come.

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the [New Revised Standard Version](#) (NRSV) New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ “14:1-24 Jesus, a Disturbing Guest.” *Luke*, by González Justo L., Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 417.