

There Is Still Room

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Sermon Text: Luke 14:15 - 23 (NIV)

Would you go to a party if you knew that the host was trying to set you up or embarrass you? Would you go to a party where people were looking to tear you down so they could be lifted up?

Most of us would throw that invitation in the trash. We would not come within a mile of giving anyone even hope of such an ambush. However a few of us might take a warrior approach. We would boldly arrive just a little late to increase the suspense. Our radar would be on full alert. We would be armed with the battle attitude of, “Give me your best shot. I’ll take on all comers.”

Jesus is invited to a party. He has participated in worship at a town’s synagogue. A prominent Pharisee, a man of great stature and influence in the “church” and the community invites Jesus along with most of his important and powerful friends over for an all afternoon and evening luncheon/dinner party at his fine large expansive home. As people in West Texas say, “Jesus is in high cotton.”

However, there is problem. There are snakes in this cotton. This host and his friends are not in awe of Jesus’ teaching. They are not seeking an experience of miracle power. They are not enlisting in the Corp of his disciples.

These Pharisee snakes are out to ruin Jesus. He has walked all over there influence with the people. He has challenged their interpretation and teaching of God’s word. He has told them they are wrong in their understanding of the heart and character of God. On no fewer than 7 occasions he has publically and purposely violated their understanding of how proper people obey the Sabbath law. He has dared to work on the Sabbath when he healed the sick, freed people from evil spirits, and picked grain for himself and his hungry disciples. They invite Jesus to this party as a set up. Jesus boldly RSVPs Yes.

The set up comes in the form of a man who the Bible describes as having dropsy. To be honest I forgot the meaning of dropsy so I Googled. The man most like had congestive heart failure. He was bloated. His puffy skin was pale. His ankle, hands, and maybe even eyelids were swollen.

The Pharisees hoped meeting this man on the Sabbath at such a prominent party would put Jesus in a no win situation. In their eyes, if Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath he would discredit himself as someone who did not obey God and know His law. If he did not heal people who had seen him heal before would wonder why not? Jesus where is your compassion and care for this man? Jesus would lose his influence and respect from the people. Theses snakes hoped Jesus would not know what to do.

Jesus knew exactly what to do. He looked at the man and then the Pharisees and religious leaders. He asked them this question, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?’ Is it okay with God that this man is healed? They refused to answer. Jesus boldly reached out and healed the man.

Jesus, turning the trap on the leaders asked a second question, “If one of you as a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” They knew their answer – Yes. They knew their written interpretation of the Law allowed for such an act on the Sabbath. In their hypocrisy they were silent before Jesus.

Can you imagine the tension in the air? Do you know what happened next?

Jesus, like a championship boxer who has his opponent backed into a corner, rushes in with fists of truth flying. Jesus notices that many of the important guests have taken the places of prominence around the eating area. They are displaying their prideful self-importance. Jesus calls them on it.

He sounds out a call to humility. Don’t take the highest place at the party. Your ego maybe wrong about itself. Take a simple quiet place. Let the host of the party, if he chooses, come and seat you at a higher place of prominence. Cast self-centered pride out of your behavior. Deflate your big-headed ego. Pray for a humble heart.

Can you imagine the tension now? As if the host of the party does not yet regret inviting Jesus, Jesus gives him more than enough reason to disinvite him. Jesus turns from the crowd and comes at the host. He has the audacity to tell the man he invited the wrong people to the party. Jesus looks him in the eye and says, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14:12 - 14 (NIV)

By this time my gut tells me the host is within a hairs breath of lining up the town thugs to ambush Jesus on his way home from the party. How would you react if one of your guests told you that you invited the wrong people to your party?

Now at this point there is a little comic relief in the story. A man sitting near Jesus decides to speak up. “Jesus, I am so glad you mentioned a dinner and banquet. You know God will throw a big banquet at the end of history. Blessed is anyone who gets to be at that banquet.”

I wonder if he was trying to defuse the tension of the moment by focusing on something positive or he was just drunk and missed the point of every thing Jesus had just said.

As if he had not said enough, Jesus takes throws one more shot by telling another banquet and party story. The story is actually the text of the morning. So let’s listen to what Jesus says, “¹⁵When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the

feast in the kingdom of God.” 16 Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ 18 “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ 19 “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ 20 “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ 21 “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ 22 “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ 23 “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.’

Why did Jesus go to this dinner party? Why did he get in the face of the guests and the host? Why did he push and push and push? Was Jesus a socially rude and ungrateful party guest? I don’t think so. Let’s not forget that these same Pharisees and religious leaders would within a few months buy the life of Jesus for 30 coins and have a direct hand in his brutal death on a cross. Polite manners are of no value when you are dealing with snakes.

Jesus acts the way he acts because he is in a battle for the truth about God. He is at war for the truth about himself. He is in a battle for the truth about how person who follow Jesus live with and love other people.

Jesus intends for us to understand that God’s heart and his heart are like the heart of the man who prepares the great feast. He has more than enough food, wine, and music, and joy for everyone to enjoy. He has a house big enough for the biggest party imaginable. He has a heart to bless. He particularly has a heart to find and bless the poor, the hurting, and forgotten people. His heart goes to the highways and hedges where the criminal and the discarded men, women and children of society hide. His heart is even big enough to invite even those who by choice reject the invitation. God’s heart is big. Jesus’ Heart is big. He will stop at nothing to celebrate being with and blessing all who will allow themselves to be accepted.

The Pharisees and the self-centered wealthy of Jesus day had either forgotten or never believed this truth about God. They thought and taught of God’s as being stern. God blessed only the special religiously acceptable people. God loved the rich. Being poor and discarded meant you had made God angry by your sin and wild living. You were outcast because God cast you out.

Jesus got in their face because they were living out a lie about God. Jesus came to tell and be the truth about God. God wants to love and bring people into relationship with himself. God has a special place in his heart for the poor, the hurting, the downtrodden and the discarded people of the world.

One of the other truths about God and life is that the servant in the story is Jesus. Jesus is God coming to hard-hearted religious people. Jesus is God coming to self-centered community leaders blinded by their own wealth and social status. Jesus is God coming to the poor and the lame. Jesus is God in the flesh coming to the forgotten of society to tell them they are not discarded by God.

Jesus also intended to teach that the servant is you. The servant is me. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says this about our relationship with Him, 24 "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.

To be a fully devoted follower of Jesus means Jesus has asked you and me to go to people and invite them to God's blessing and God's party. He is strong in his asking. He uses the phrase "compel people to come" to the party in the story. His words draw a picture of a person with a passionate drive and heart that will not stop until it accomplishes that which its heart desires. Jesus is not telling us to force people to come to God. He commands us to ask him for heart that beats with the force and power and never dying passion to love and serve and invite people into a relationship with God and the kingdom.

Now let's get real at this point. Most of us struggle with this Jesus. We think we don't know how to be the servant. We run into the wall of our culture that blocks us with the idea that good people don't talk to others about God. We hope he calls others to be the servants. We'll want to stay at the party and prepare the food. Let others go out.

Jesus clearly intends for us to get the message. You are the servant. I am the servant. Servants go to tell and invite people to the party of His love and grace. Let's talk about three simple but effective ways to be a servant for Jesus.

First ask yourself a question. Who are you praying for to come to know Jesus? You can pray for people even if you have no clue about what they believe or don't believe about Jesus. Let's say you were going to pray for a coworker named Miguel. You could pray this, "Lord, I don't know whether Miguel knows you or not. I would never presume to judge him. Lord I pray that He grows closer to you. Lord bless Him. Reveal yourself to him. Help him seek you. Lord help me become a better friend." You pray that kind of prayer and you are being a servant for Jesus.

Second, who are you inviting to worship? Who connects with Jesus at LakeRidge Praise because you took the risk to believe that they would enjoy our Sunday morning party of praise and worship? Servants who struggle to talk on-on-one with others can invite others to the house where Jesus can talk with them.

Third, how do you and your family step closer to the poor and the discarded people of this world? This past week 6 people from LakeRidge step out of their comfort zone to be servants. They

are a ministry team which oversees programs and events that are all about getting people to come into the walls of this church. They decided to step outside the walls. They reserved the church van. They raided their closets for gently worn coats and winter gear. They put together a few packets for moms with babies. They put together some sack lunches. They brought individual amounts of money to put in a pot. Their pot totaled \$105. They drove off in the van to perform random acts of kindness for people who needed someone to be kind.

They gave a coat, a meal, a hug, and a prayer to a young man without legs and an old man struggling to survive on dialysis. They blessed a young mother with several kids. They drove up to a Sonic, went inside, and anonymously paid for the meal of a family driving a beat-up run-down clunker. They paid the \$10 grocery bill of a family with 10 people in a van. They gave \$4.00 in quarters to a grandmother at a laundry mat only to hear her scream with joy, "When I saw you get out of your van I just knew it was going to be a great day." They gave multiple helps to family only to have the family circle up the team in their little house so the father of the house could shake the rafters of heaven with a prayer of blessing over the team. Servants of Jesus intentionally and purposely take steps to serve, love and help the poor, the sick, the lost, and the discarded people of the world. Servants of Jesus live to help people know that God and God's church cares.

Today we celebrate communion. A simple meal set by the Lord so we can remember that we were once outside the party. A simple act of worship which teaches us Jesus sought us out. Jesus served us by graciously giving us an invitation to God's banquet.

Today we celebrate a simple meal that reminds us this same Jesus commands us to love others as we have been loved by him. As we enter into communion I want you to ask Jesus to show you your heart. Does your heart beat with the passion and compassion for the poor, the sick, the downtrodden of this world? Does your heart ache because people you know are outside the party? Do you have the heart of a servant? Do you see that there is still room for others in God's party?