

You are invited to a block party! August 28, 2022, Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 Luke 14:1.7-14

I love Jesus' parables even when most of them throw me into a tizzy. Maybe that is his intent. Not to humiliate us when we don't get what he is saying, but to shake us out of our familiar assumptions and into God's viewpoint.

Today's Gospel starts with a surprising invitation. A pharisee, who we often hear were not exactly fans of Jesus, invites him to dinner. In fact the person issuing the invitation is the leader of the pharisees. What a surprise! Immediately we are wary. What is happening? Why is everyone watching Jesus closely? To see how he handles the Sabbath meal protocols perhaps? See how easy it is for us to get suspicious about other people's behavior?

Jesus looks at the other people who were invited to dinner. He tells them a parable. When you are invited to a wedding banquet don't rush in and take the best seat. You might get demoted! Instead, take the lower seat because then you might get promoted, Which of course is what you were hoping; one way or another being seen as a very special guest! The host might even call you friend. Talk about a banquet! Oh how our ego loves to be fed.

Jesus then speaks directly to everyone at the Sabbath table. Remember that everyone, including Jesus, had been invited. He tells them that when *they* have a chance to invite people to a dinner to *not invite* their friends or brothers or sisters or rich neighbors. Why? Because then the dinner is transactional. I invite you. You invite me. Now we are even. Which is course is not God's way. God's way is covenantal. Promises made by God to us!

Given those different ways to invite, do something outrageous! Invite people who cannot pay back. The poor, the crippled, the blind, the outcasts. You *will* be repaid at a different time and place; at the "resurrection of the righteous."

When you are in right relationships with everyone.

This week I also heard two modern day parables which made me laugh and cry.

The first was a story told by one of our church members who said that there was a block party in her neighborhood. You know, the parties where everyone is invited to just show up and have a grand old time. The whole reason for the party is to bring the block together for the sheer joy of it and to build relationship with neighbors.

The person telling me the story said that she decided to not attend. Was she shy or too busy or not sure if the invitation was for her too? I don't know. As the block party was going on she tried to sneak on by and people from the block called out to her. Hey! Come hang with us. You were invited! Their instant invitations bowled her over. "Are you talking to me?"

The second story is another one of those rich memories that have been popping up for me as I lean toward retirement. I remember that once, or maybe twice, our Leadership Team suggested that our church host a neighborhood block party. We would set up the tent, make a bunch of food, and give everyone on the block an invitation and hopefully lots of people would come and it would be just plain fun.

I remember that someone said we should not host the party because some people on the block might eat and ask for seconds “to go” and not even say thank you. Some people are like that. They don’t repay.

We all agreed that sometimes this does happen, but we decided to have the party. People came and everyone had fun and ate together. It is true, that some did not repay with thanks or reciprocal invitations. Some asked for seconds.

When I hear Jesus’ teaching today, I think we could count those church block parties as a great experience in Gospel living. Don’t invite folks who can pay you back! We learned a lot about ourselves by hosting those block parties. And we learned something, but not everything, about our block.

Put these stories together with the Letter to the Hebrews where we were encouraged to “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” and what we get is a shocking reminder that actually we are all invited. And because we also all get to die, we also all get to see just what happens at the resurrection of the righteous.

It does not matter if we are sitting at the top or the bottom of the picnic table. None of us can repay free will gifts like banquets, and potlucks, and random invitations. And Jesus.

That is not the point. Parables do not have points.

Maybe God is inviting us today to not overthink. To, day by day, push over and pass the potatoes. To offer a grace, “Bless us O Lord and these thy gifts” and look around to see who is at the table. It turns out that the whole block is invited.

Come! You are invited too! Amen