

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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August 28, 2022

Luke 14:1,7-14

In the gospel lesson for today, Jesus gets invited to dinner. In Jesus's day, an invitation to dinner was not just an invitation to a pleasant evening with wonderful pork tenderloin or lasagna. A dinner party was a public event. People watched from the edge of the courtyard, to see who got to sit closest to the host. Whoever got to sit closest to the host was honored, seen as important. Their status in the village would increase. If you were seated far away from the host, or if someone insulted you at the dinner, then you would be shamed, your status would decrease.

This honor and shame did not just stop with bragging rights. If you had a high honor rating, a high status in the village, people would want to do business with you. They would be willing to lend you money. They would be more likely to want to marry you, or to marry their children to your children. It was a big deal.

And if you were shamed, if you lost honor, then people would be less likely to want to do business with you. They would be less likely to lend you money. They would be less interested in you as a marriage partner, or in your children as marriage partners for theirs.

Scholars call this the honor-shame system, and it was the fabric of first century society. If you honored someone by inviting them to a meal, then they were expected to give honor you inviting you in return.

Nowadays we don't have nearly as much of an honor shame society as we do a credit debt society. If you have a lot of credit, or a lot of money, if you appear successful, that is, if you appear wealthy, then people will want to do business with you. They

will be more likely to lend you money, and at a better interest rate than if you have a lot of debt, or if you are poor. Also, for many of us, it is much easier to fall in love with someone richer than we are, isn't it.

It's the way the world works: honor/shame, credit/debit. And Jesus blows the top off of them all.

Jesus says, "When you invite someone to a dinner party, do not invite the rich, who can pay you back, but invite the poor, who cannot. And you will have your reward at the resurrection."

I wonder what would happen if Jesus came to one of our famous Lutheran potlucks. Surely, he would enjoy the delightful lasagna. He would savor the delicious pork tenderloin. But then, I think he might stand up and sniff. He would sniff and sniff. "What's that smell," he would say, or rather, "What's that lack of a smell? It smells like everybody in here has had a bath in the last day or so."

"Which, there's nothing wrong with taking a bath or a shower. It's just, where are the people who can't? Where are the people who don't have access to a bathroom with shower? It doesn't smell like they are here. This doesn't smell like a church at all!"

I can imagine Jesus suggesting that we buy a van or send cars to people who do not have houses or apartments to stay in, that we invite houseless persons to accept a ride to church and to share lunch with us afterward. He might even suggest a capital campaign in which we in showers in the building so that they can clean up.

Now, I will tell you about a voice in my mind. I confess that there is a voice in my mind that says, "But Jesus, those people might make some of our new people feel uncomfortable. And we need new people because we are a relatively old congregation. We need people who will put money in the offering plate. And homeless people don't have much money to put in the offering plate." "Jesus, you know, we've got to survive. We can't bring them here. It won't be good for the church."

I can just see Jesus giving me that look, and saying, "Are you so sure? Are you so sure it's not exactly what your church needs, here, in a time when people think, not completely wrongly, that the church, that is, Christians in general, only think about

themselves; that Christians want everybody else to think like they do and act like they do and believe like they do. That's not true, but it's not completely wrong, either. Are you sure doing something like this with homeless people isn't exactly what you need?"

"Invite people who can't pay you back," Jesus says. "And you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

What does that mean? A few weeks ago, I jokingly suggested that it means, when we get to heaven we will receive a treasure chest full of emeralds and rubies and pearls. No I don't think that's what it means.

I think we can catch a glimpse of what it means now, because this congregation doesn't do nothing. We are gathering non-perishable food items for Street Reach to give to people who do not have a place to stay. Also, we are welcoming our fourth refugee family on September 15 at 1:10 P.M.

And I know that voice. It says, "But Jesus, none of those refugees have joined our church. They can't give any money." No. They join churches where they worship in their own languages. Two of our refugees are Muslim. They're probably going to a mosque these days.

Where's the benefit, then? You will glimpse the benefit, the reward when you remember the moment we gave Felician and Beatrice and Blessing and little Queen, from The Democratic Republic of Congo, where there has been relentless war for decades, from refugee camps, where they have spent many years. They came here, and we stitched quilts, here, and prayed over the quilts, here, and wrapped them around their children, here. You remember that moment, will see how the reward comes here.

You will see the reward if you remember the night we stood there in the terminal at Louisville airport for two hours waiting for our refugees from Afghanistan, two men who had helped our troops, worked with our U.S. military personnel and who had to escape because the Taliban was looking for them to kill them, if you were there at that airport terminal, and you saw those two men walking down that terminal, exhausted, and if you remember greeting them, and how one of them said, "We are eternally thankful," you will see the reward.

That's the kingdom of heaven, that waits for us beyond the grave, and breaks into this world through you. God brings this kind of thing about through you, when you put money in the plate, whatever amount that might be, or help with your time, whatever amount of time that might be, or pray for the church, or choose an attitude of abundance and hope in the church, then God brings moments of the kingdom through you.

This changes everything. Thanks be to God.