

Sermon on Luke 14:12-24 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Luke 14:12-24

The Church is for those we least expect, and that's good news.

While on vacation one of the kids requested to see snow so my in-laws hatched a plan to find it. Mt. Hood in Oregon, at 7,000ft above sea level, still had snow (ski season that goes through August!)

And to get to it, once on the mountain, you have to ride a one-mile ski lift up to the snow. A very high, off the ground ski lift... without 20 feet of snow to catch you.

Now, you should know, I tremendously dislike heights. God has not given me a spirit of fear... but when it comes to heights it feels pretty close!

To make the experience all the more harrowing, we brought our youngest daughter up the mountain in her wheelchair which rode the ski lift with us, but was just big enough that the security bar would not close down to hold us in. As we are loading my dear wife tells the operator "We'll be fine!"

I was freaked out. Thinking "I don't belong here!"

Being part of a church can feel like that!

I have been spending some of the summer thinking about who the church is for, and how we build it, hopefully with fewer "fear-of-heights" moments...

Today we are revisiting a parable that paints a picture of the Kingdom, the church, that we mustn't neglect.

Context: Luke's gospel is telling the story of Jesus' ministry in Judea - his teaching, healings. In Luke 14 Jesus is sticking it to the Ruler of the

Pharisees, the religious elite of the day. It was this man who was hosting a dinner party that Jesus attended, an evening full of posturing for position.

Jesus will confront their expectations of the kingdom of God. As God's people, set apart for his glory, these leaders had missed the melody along the way that the kingdom would be for everyone who would worship God. In their occupation, they oppress, reject, and even try to catch Jesus slipping.

He corrects them, but more than that he gives a vision for the banquet that is the church.

Five characteristics of those this kingdom/church is for.

1) Those that Need a Feast

Just before the parable Jesus tells the host that when he gives a dinner or banquet he should not invite those capable of their own feast but those in need that cannot repay. Because repayment will come in the resurrection.

Mentions them, which he will again in the parable. "The poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind."

Those without resource.

Not those that are hungry, but those that can't provide what is needed in themselves.

Pharisees count on position or parenting for entry into the Kingdom, but the Kingdom is for those that can't afford it.

This makes me think of recovery programs and what is always the first step, admitting you have a problem.

Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
(ESV)

All are in need, it's the recognition of it that matters!

Levi's feast: **Luke 5:30–32** “And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” [31] And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (ESV)

The church is not a place to merely level up, it is for those that need salvation, life, purpose, hope.

The quicker we are to carry ourselves humbly in light of this reality, the closer we are to what Jesus says the church is.

The church must be a place of humble dependence on Jesus. This is who He invites into his Kingdom, those that don't have the credit for it.

2) Those that Bring Their Mess

Diving now into the parable, there was a man who gave a great banquet.

Why a banquet? Well for one, they are having one. Perfect for the setting. But it is also the imagery they were supposed to pick up on.

Isaiah 25:6 “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.”

This is the Kingdom.

In this story, the great man invites many to feast with him. Now it was customary then to receive two invitations to a banquet. There was the first to let you know it was happening and you were invited, honored. Then a second when servants came and let you know the feast was ready, the food was on.

The Kingdom works in the same way. There is a double invitation - the teachings and prophets make clear the Kingdom is coming, that the banquet would have well-aged wine and rich food. It outlines life in preparation as God's people and they were to live with for the feast.

Now the food is ready, Messiah has come and calls them in, yet those invited make excuses.

Bought a field; bought five yoke of oxen; married a wife.

Couple of things at play in this rejection.

The first two excuses had to do with material possessions, and the third with affections. Possessions and affections cover virtually every reason by which men and women give their regrets to the kingdom. Finding meaning in other things (idolatry).

But I also see something else here, the rejections/excuses are letting life and circumstances, or people knowing about them, keep you from the banquet. Think of the stranger who says "I will come to church once I get my life cleaned up!"

Not dissimilar to those in need, but I want to make a distinction between the need for salvation and the need for Jesus to renovate my heart and life.

Keeping up appearances will kill you. It will lead you to reject the church, which is meant to be a community to carry each other.

Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (ESV)

No one will bear these burdens with me unless they know. We bear with one another because Jesus bore our burdens, living a life of perfect obedience before God in our place and taking on the cross that our sin deserves.

The church is meant to be the place to apply shame-killing grace. And when we bring our mess, the real things of life that we face, struggle through, we will be surprised of the resources for help around us. More people will have experienced the same things than we realize.

The church is for those that bring their mess. Don't deny the body the opportunity to care for you.

3) Those that are Unseen

In the story the excuse-makers won't come and the Master tells the servant to, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' 21 (ESV)

The list again.

We often spiritualize this list (spiritually crippled etc). But Jesus uses the list describing real people not metaphorical ones. Those undervalued, that proper society prefers to not see.

We could probably expand this list to match our cultural moment but it makes clear, the church is for the least.

Through it all, it's always upside-down. Opposite of what the culture - even of God's people - expects. This heralded kingdom is for the least, the dirty, the poor, the broken-hearted. And that is who his ministry reaches.

We can get so focused on the business, the brand, that we are prone to neglect the people Jesus indicated the church would be for.

He is commanding that nobodies be welcomed into the feast. This was a culture that despised the broken and unclean. And he says, yeah, those are the ones you should celebrate with. That you should share your good wine with.

“14:13 Handicapped—Jesus told his Pharisee host he should have a banquet for disabled persons rather than for relatives and rich friends. Then he would receive God’s blessings. The disabled should participate fully in our churches. God welcomes the disabled with their special gifts into his kingdom.”

Not an added program when we have the capacity, the unseen are an essential in the church. Notice verse 22: “And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’” (ESV)

These are foundational to the church.

“For the church, accessibility and a safe, welcoming environment for those with disabilities is vital. However, the special treatment should stop there. People with special needs are human, just like you and me. They want to be seen and treated with respect and kindness, to be known and talked to... When we do not include those with disabilities, everyone suffers. The individual, the family, and the church are incomplete.” Natalie Maxwell

A place to belong... This informs our efforts toward inclusion and disability ministry. Creating a space for everyone to feast on the goodness of the Lord in community.

And when the unseen are part of the church, the community becomes compelling.

4) Those that are Compelling

There is still room at the banquet.

“He tells his servants to find the most disreputable people of all, those standing around in the highways and near fences, who are begging for assistance and known as vagabonds. “The areas outside the city would have been inhabited by outcast groups (ethnic groups, tanners, traders, beggars,

prostitutes), who required access to the city but were not allowed to live in it.”

I am convinced that when the church is a place for those in need, that bring their mess/real life, the unseen - the presence of Jesus will be undeniable and compelling to those longing and looking for hope.

The banquet gives us a vision for a church that smells like Jesus and we want more to meet him. It is our mission to make him known.

Matthew 28:18–20 “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

It is what’s empowering, the house is meant to be filled.

The church is for those that follow Jesus and invite others to follow him too.

Lucy in Prince Caspian by C.S. Lewis. Children back in Narnia, hundreds of years of change and not sure about the way. Lucy, the youngest, sees Aslan, the Great Lion, and he tells her to follow him and bring the others. The older kids and the “Dear-little-Friend” Dwarf haven’t been able to see Aslan and Lucy is concerned they won’t believe her this time.

Aslan tells her that she is to follow him no matter what, if the others see or not. She convinces them to wake up and go, and eventually, one by one they see him.

We follow Jesus with the hopes those around us will see him.

And that’s the point of the church.

5) Those that Want to be with the Master

Stretching the text a bit here, but those at the banquet want to be in the presence of the master. He is still inviting us today.

Jesus declaring woe on unrepentant cities; **Matthew 11:25–30** “At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; [26] yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. [27] All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. [28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (ESV)

God’s compassion, his mercy, is never earned but given. You miss it if you reject it.

Jesus offers the kingdom, a perpetual feast of peace, a feast of help, guidance, friendship, rest, victory over self, control of passions, supremacy over circumstances—a feast of joy, tranquillity, deathlessness, Heaven opened, immeasurable hope—salvation.

It’s him. He is ours if we will just come.

“He paid the highest price, made the most extravagant provision imaginable – his own flesh & blood. There is no more costly costliness than the cross of Christ. He did that for sinners like us. He spared no expense. He held nothing back. He gave it all, that we might have it all.” Jared Wilson

The Pharisees wanted to be around Jesus because he had fame.

The full wanted to be around Jesus because they got a meal.

True disciples follow Jesus because they want him alone.

If your way into the Kingdom is coming to him, you must know ahead of time, this will be what defines you for eternity. Not your pedigree. Not your position. Not your worldly power. But the person of Jesus.

The essence of being a disciple of Christ is unreserved commitment to him. This involves holding loosely everything else that attempts to take his place.

The church is not meant primarily for a political program, moral training, advice on getting ahead in business, or perpetuating a religious enterprise. It is meant to be a place to meet and follow Jesus. Shoulder to shoulder with others in need of a feast, living the mess of life, unseen neighbors. As a compelling glimpse of the Kingdom.

The Church is for those we least expect, and that's good news.

The last several weeks I have been going to physical therapy, and I have found it to be a lot like this banquet.

There is always a lightness to the room, joy in the place. A few doctors encouraging us along. But everyone there is broken, we bring our pain with us and we are getting better, together.

It's a picture of the church, a banquet that is practice for the feast of Christ's return.

May it be so in us.