

Ready to Serve

August 28, 2016

Luke 14: 1 and 7-14

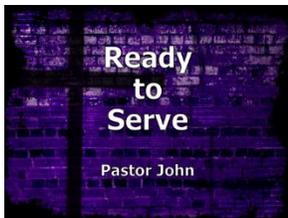
¹One Sabbath, Jesus was having dinner in the home of an important Pharisee, and everyone was carefully watching Jesus.

⁷Jesus saw how the guests had tried to take the best seats. So he told them: ⁸When you are invited to a wedding feast, don't sit in the best place. Someone more important may have been invited. ⁹Then the one who invited you will come and say, "Give your place to this other guest!" You will be embarrassed and will have to sit in the worst place.

¹⁰When you are invited to be a guest, go and sit in the worst place. Then the one who invited you may come and say, "My friend, take a better seat!" You will then be honored in front of all the other guests. ¹¹If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honored.

¹²Then Jesus said to the man who had invited him: When you give a dinner or a banquet, don't invite your friends and family and relatives and rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return, and you will be paid back. ¹³When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴They cannot pay you back. But God will bless you and reward you when his people rise from death.

[Video: Need]



Where is the need in Winner, South Dakota? Where would one go to find the addicted? Where would one go to find the broken? Where would one go to find the lost? Where would one go to find the stuck? Where

would one go to meet their needs? What does the church have to offer?

In today's passage Jesus is talking about a place at the table and who we should invite to the table. Jesus is talking about being humble when we enter into a situation or setting and Jesus is talking about being willing to engage the addicted, the broken, the lost, the stuck, and a whole lot of other people. For almost all of us, being humble is a much more comfortable idea. But engaging 'those people'... that is harder, that is outside of our comfort zone, that is dangerous. Let us pray...



When was the last time you were one of many dinner guests in someone else's house? Think back to the last time. Was there a pecking order of where people sat?

Other than a wedding, I cannot think of the last time I was somewhere that there was some sort of an order. At a dinner party, at best, maybe the head of the household has their usual seat at the table. So this concept that Jesus is speaking of is a little foreign to us.

In Jesus' day, the society was very stratified. People knew their place in their neighborhood or small village, at the family gathering. To help you understand this, think back to the family dinner table that you grew up around. In a class I took this summer, Dr. Al had us do an activity to introduce ourselves to the class. He began by drawing the dinner table of his childhood and explained where everyone sat. Then he drew the dinner table of his family and explained where everyone sat. Then we



each took turns explaining our tables. It revealed a lot about several of us. So think of the dinner table you grew up around as a child. What happened if someone sat in Dad's seat? What happened if a younger sibling sat in your seat? You get the picture.

So in today's passage, Jesus is talking about one's place at the table, about the pecking order. His advice to sit at the lowest spot. In a way He saying to hold back and see who all is invited. He is saying to be humble and to assume that more honored guests may be on the way. The worst case scenario then is that the host invites you to a better spot. Think back to the family table. Remember when the older brother or sister went off to college? Did the next child move up into that spot? But woe to that younger child if they did not move back down when brother or sister was home on break! This advice to be humble, to be gracious, applies to the second half of our passage.



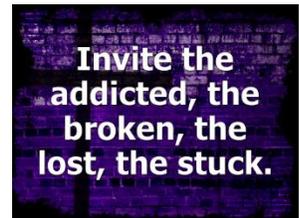
The second half of today's passage is the one that has more impact upon us today. Jesus begins by talking about inviting our friends to a meal. He says our natural inclination is to repay them by inviting them over the next time we have a dinner party. Sound familiar? We went to the Jones' last month so this month when we have a gathering, we better invite them. There is nothing really wrong with this except we will have received our reward once the meals are over. It is all nice and tidy and fun. How nice.

What Jesus advises instead is harder, is outside of our comfort zone, is dangerous. Jesus says this: *"¹³ When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ They cannot pay you back. But God will bless you and reward you when his people rise from death."*



"Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind". In Jesus' day these were the outcasts, the ostracized, the lonely. They lived life outside, on the margins of society. They could not invite you over to their house sometime next month.

Today we would say, "invite the addicted, the broken, the lost, the stuck". Maybe we could go back to just inviting the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. These, after all, are mostly physical challenges. One is blind or lame or crippled and accommodations can be made. It is what it is. For example, one cannot usually become 'un-blind'. And I even think most of us are comfortable with the poor.



But we must be careful here. If we are thinking, "I know lots of good people who are poor" then we have crossed a line we should not cross. When we do so we have lost the humility and grace that the first half of our passage calls us to. Jesus was saying that in grace and humility, we need to invite all people, especially those others shun. Jesus was saying



we need to welcome all people to our table, no matter who or what they are. We need to have a humble opinion of ourselves and to be willing to extend God's grace to all.

When we choose to define who is okay to be at our table and who is not, then we are judging and comparing ourselves to others. This is a dangerous road to go down. If we are truly following Jesus, we cannot pick and choose who we will love. Imagine if God did that with us! If this were the case, I would hope God picked when I was having a good day. But if I were to be honest, I would have to admit that I used to want to pick who I would love and who I would welcome to the table.

Seven years ago, the church I was a member of in Rapid City bought the building next to the church with the dream of opening a day center for the homeless and economically disadvantaged in the community. In Rapid City the Cornerstone Rescue Mission is not open during the day so all clients must be out of the building after breakfast until just before dinner. Folks could go to the library or to a restaurant for a bit but they were kept moving along. So Pastor Doug cast the vision to buy the



building and open a day center. Six years ago, after some renovations, the HOPE Center opened. Over the next two years I was a marginally involved. Our Youth and Young Adults groups would do projects and other

things to help the clients. But I was still not really engaged and still saw things as “us” and “them” for the most part.

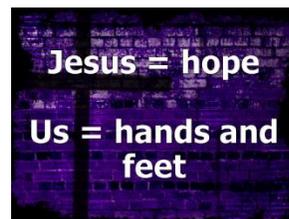
Then, four years ago, the Sunday School class I was leading studied a devotional book called “My Thirty Days Under the Overpass”. It was based on the book, Under the Overpass. The book details how two college sophomores decided they would try being homeless for the summer. They spent five months in six different cities and wrote about their experiences. For me it put a human face on the homeless. It forever changed my outlook on “them”. Then, just over two years ago, I started volunteering on Friday afternoons at the HOPE Center in Rapid City. I came to understand that every person who is homeless or addicted or broken or lost or stuck is maybe just a step or two removed from where I am today. The man in the foreground of the picture is Wolfe. The next one back is James. Both are Christian men who I would let stay in my home. Both are just a couple of tough breaks from the normal, everyday life you and I live. As I met and talked and worked with the guests of the HOPE Center, I learned two basic truths. First, we are all just a few steps removed from being in a tough spot. Second, we are all more alike than we are different.



Each of us is probably only two or three bad breaks or poor decisions from being addicted or broken or lost or stuck. For some, the steps from clean and sober to addicted are pretty short steps. All of us are just one sudden and unexpected illness or death from being lost. Each of us are just a poor choice or two from being totally broken. No one wakes up one morning and says “I am going to become an addict today”. No one intentionally goes out and says “I am going to make some stupid choices

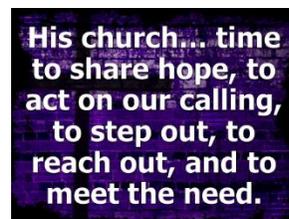
today and ruin my marriage". All of us are just two or three steps away. But by the grace of God here we sit today. So when Jesus tells us to "*invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind*", He means it. Because if we do not invite them, how will they ever come to know grace?

Let's go back to our opening video. In the video we heard what we are told in the Bible. Jesus is the hope of the world. We are Jesus' hands and feet. Do you believe this? Jesus is certainly our hope. He is our only hope. But are we really called to be Jesus' servants in our world? Matthew



28, verses 19 and 20, certainly say so. These verses read, "¹⁹*Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰*and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.*" Note that there are no qualification or limitations. The word Jesus used was "all". Are we ready to serve Jesus in this way?

As we come to a close today, let me remind us all of the closing lines of the video. It stated, "For the church, His church, it is time... to share the hope we have, to act on our calling, to step out, to reach out, and to meet the need."



Where is the need in Winner, South Dakota? Where would one go to find the addicted? Where would one go to find the broken? Where would one go to find the lost? Where would one go to find the stuck? Where would one go to meet their needs? What does the church have to offer?

The addicted, the broken, the lost, and the stuck are here. They live next door to us. They live down the street from the church. They live across town. They are all around us. What does the church have to offer? Hope. Love. Community. Jesus. This is what we have to offer. Are we ready to serve Jesus Christ? Are we ready to meet the need? Are we ready to serve our Lord and Savior, the Lord and Savior of all? Let us pray.