

Who Should We Invite to Taste the Banquet?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Hello, Christchurch.

My name is Karp. I am on the AV and CC Kids teams. Today's reading is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 14, verses 7 through 24, as printed in your liturgy.

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable. When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor.

For a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, give this person your seat.

[1 : 08] Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, friend, move up to a better place.

Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Then Jesus said to his host, when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors.

If you do, they may invite you back, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

[2 : 16] Jesus replied, A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, Come, for everything is now ready.

But they all, like, began to make excuses. The first said, I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me. Another said, I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out.

Please excuse me. Still another said, I just got married, so I can't come. The servant came back and reported this to his master.

Then the owner of the house became angry, and ordered a servant, Go out, quickly, into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

Sir, the servant said, What you ordered has been done, but there is still room. Then the master told his servant, Go out into the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.

[3 : 27] I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet. This is the gospel of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church.

It's March Madness, and there's basketball on today, so we've got to just get through this, because Duke and Baylor are playing at 1140.

So, we are jumping back into the gospel of Luke, and we're here in Luke 14, Jesus' amazing parable of the great banquet, the great feast.

And we didn't print verse 1, which tells us where this is taking place. It's taking place at a Sabbath feast, and it's taking place in the home of a Pharisee who was a teacher and a leader of Israel.

And at that table, and with these other guests, and around this feast, Jesus tells some simple stories that on the surface also seem to be just about your common, ordinary, everyday feasts, and hosts, and guests, and invitations, and last-minute cancellations, and lame excuses, and unlikely invitations to guests who end up seeming completely unworthy to be there.

[4 : 53] And one of the things we need to know as we get into this is that Jews in the first century, they shared a biblical vision, they shared a biblical conviction about a coming feast in the future.

You've kind of already heard about this. We've sung about this today. This messianic banquet, this banquet of the Messiah that would come in the fullness of time. And that's what Jesus is referring to there in verse 14 when he talks about this feast that's coming at the resurrection of the righteous.

And that lights off the table guests in verse 15 to say, yes, blessed is the one who will feast and eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

So Jewish people in the first centuries, they read their Bibles, they shared this belief and this hope in a future when God would put the world to rights, and he would do away with all sin and suffering and death.

And he would make all things in his creation new. And when he did that, God would spread a table and he would invite everyone to the feast, not just Jews, but Gentiles as well.

[5 : 58] That part of the story tends to be forgotten quite a lot. But if you want to pull out your pew Bibles, I encourage you to turn in your pew Bibles to page 573.

Page 573, you'll find this classic text from the prophet Isaiah. Page 573, Isaiah chapter 25, starting in verse 6.

It speaks of this feast and the prophet says this, or God through his prophet says this, On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, and the finest of wines.

Now in Hebrew poetry, that sounds kind of like this, a feast of filet and a banquet of cabernet. Filet mignon, cabernet sauvignon. It's beautiful poetry.

And it goes on, it says, on this mountain he will destroy the shroud that unfolds all peoples. He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away all the tears from all the faces and he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.

[7 : 10] And down in verse 9, it says, let us rejoice and be glad in this great salvation. And Jesus, in Luke chapter 13, right before the text we just heard, he says this in Luke 13, he says, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets and people coming from the east and the west and the north and the south, they will all take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

So there's this kingdom feast where all hunger and tears and shame are going to be gone. And this table guest in verse 15, he's pretty certain.

You know, he says, blessed are those who eat at the feast of the kingdom of God. He's pretty certain about his future. He's super confident that he and all the people around this table with Jesus are going to be at that ultimate feast in the kingdom of God.

And Jesus says, okay, well, since you brought it up, let's talk about that. You know, let's talk about who's going to be at this ultimate feast, this ultimate party and table of salvation in the kingdom of God.

And so Jesus tells this story about a host who gives a banquet with some unexpected twists and surprising turns. And what Jesus is telling us, I think, is this, that we need to rearrange our priorities around this feast, that we need to invite unlikely guests to the feast, and that we need to take the lowest place at the feast.

[8 : 43] Okay, three things. I'm going in reverse order of Jesus, but that may not be wise, but here we go. Arrange your priorities around the feast, invite unlikely guests to the feast, and take the lowest place at the feast.

First of all, arrange your priorities around the feast. Verse 16, Jesus replied, he said, a certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.

So who's the host in Jesus' story? The host is God. And why does he invite so many guests? Well, it says in verse 23, this host, he says, I want my house to be full.

He's a wealthy and a generous host, and he has a good and a gracious heart, and he wants to include as many people as he can possibly squeeze in.

He likes having a crowded and a noisy and a full house. And so it says in verse 17, at the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, come, for everything is now ready.

[9 : 40] There's this interesting double invitation. The first invitation is, hey, we're having a party next Saturday night, so get ready. And everybody says, yeah, great, great, we will be there.

And then the second invitation goes out on the day of, and it says, hey, the party is ready, the fattened calf has been barbecued, and it's going to be served at 6 p.m., and your good and gracious host is waiting for you to come.

So this first invitation is about the great feast, the great banquet that's coming, and the second invitation is about the great feast that's here, it's arrived, it's ready.

And what Jesus is saying is that God's feast, it's no longer out there in the future. God's feast is right here, right now. Jesus is surely talking about himself and his own arrival on the scene, that God's son has stepped out of eternity and into time.

God's Messiah has come from heaven to earth, and that means that God's messianic banquet is no longer coming in the future. He says, come for all is now ready.

[10 : 50] And God invites a bunch of people. He's seeking to gather in as many people as are willing, but they don't come. They refuse to show up.

And this is the totally tragic and disastrous turn of events in this story. Not only do these invited guests miss out on this amazing feast, but even worse, this good and gracious host is rudely insulted and humiliated, right?

And who are these guests? Who are the guests that don't show up? Well, it says in verse 18, but they all alike begin to make excuses. The first said, I have just bought a field and I must go and see it.

Please excuse me. Another said, I just bought five yoke of oxen. I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me. Still another said, I just got married, so I just can't come. Each person in Jesus' story is a successful achiever, right?

They all have enough money to at least buy property. The other has enough money to drive a tin ox-powered vehicle. Very fancy.

[11 : 59] At least one of them, one of these strivers is established enough to attract a spouse and to become newly married. All of them are affluent enough and comfortable enough to think to themselves what they do not say out loud, which is, you know, I'm not really sure I need the host and I need his feast.

And just to be clear, like none of these people are anti-host and anti-feast, right? They're all glad that the host is there. They appreciate what he does for their community. They receive his invitation.

They indicate every intention of being present at his party. And they seem positively disposed to come to the feast.

Just like this guy in verse 15 who says, blessed are all who eat bread at the feast in the kingdom of God. They hope to be there. They desire to be there. But Jesus says, none of them are found at the feast.

Many who seem interested just simply won't be there. Why is that? What Jesus says, verse 18, they all began to make excuses. And anyone in the ancient Near East that's hearing these excuses would know that these excuses are lame and they are ludicrous.

[13 : 13] Right? What are the priorities that are higher than the host and higher than the feast? Well, this first guy, he bought a field. And of course, there's nothing wrong with buying property. But why does he need to go see this property if he's already bought it?

And why does he need to go right now at dinnertime, at night, in the dark? Right? He's allowed a small piece of this world to get into his soul and to capture his attention and divide his heart and to become more important to him than the host and the feast.

And this field, it may be a valuable field, but it's just a field and it's causing him to miss out on the greatest feast of his life. Same with the second guy.

There's nothing wrong with buying oxen and going out and getting the things that you need to do your work. There's nothing wrong with work, but he basically says to the host, these beasts of burden, my work, all the things that I hope to accomplish in my life, all of them are more important to me than my relationship with you.

And the third guy, the third guy's newly married and of course marriage is one of God's greatest gifts. Amen? That was a little weak. That was a little weak.

[14 : 31] But this third guy, you know, why can't he bring his wife to the feast? What's up with this guy? At least the first guy and the second guy say, please excuse me, but the third guy, he doesn't ask to be excused, he just says, I can't come, no apologies.

These are to allow your host to go through all the expense and all the preparations and yet to leave him hanging with no one to partake of the food is to cause him to be rudely snubbed and humiliated and ignored and insulted.

And what is Jesus trying to communicate with us about these lame excuses? Jesus is saying, you know, it's one thing to say that we believe in God, but it's another thing to act on it.

Right? It doesn't matter so much what we say about God, it matters what we do in our relationship with God. All three of these people, they believe in the host, they desire to be at the feast, they accept the invitation, but in the day-to-day life, how do they and how do we rank this feast in our actual life, our actual priorities, our actual commitments?

Does Christ and his gospel invitation to the messianic feast claim first place in our lives? Have we placed everything else, our fields, our possessions, our houses, our oxen, our work, our bank accounts, our spouses, and our kids, and our family life, have we placed all these things in a subordinate position?

[16 : 07] Does the kingdom of God take precedence over everything else, and have we given it our exclusive loyalty, and our wholehearted devotion, or are we allowing good things but lesser things?

Good things but temporary things to cause us to miss out on the greatest and most important thing that could possibly happen to us, this feast that has come and is coming in Jesus Christ.

You see, they were all guilty of accepting God's invitation conditionally, the condition being that the feast should fit in with and suit their convenience. They were honored to be invited, they had, and had nothing else intervened, they would have been present as long as it involved no sacrifice on their part.

All would have been well. They would appear when it suited them, if nothing else was present, and if they felt like it, but other things were pressing, and other things did intervene and they didn't feel like it and more immediate interests busied them.

And they found that feast to be inconvenient because they placed their convenience before everything else. And the people who made these excuses, they imagined that future opportunities would come and that all would be well, but what does Jesus say in verse 21?

[17 : 30] In verse 24, the servant came back and reported this to his master and then the owner of the house became angry. In verse 24, I tell you, not one of those who are invited will get a taste of my banquet.

And I so wish I could soften those words for you, but I don't presume to do that. Jesus is saying, you've got to arrange your priorities, you've got to arrange your entire life around this feast.

That's point number one. Point number two, not only arrange your priorities around the feast, but you've got to invite unlikely guests to the feast. Invite unlikely guests to the feast.

Just before Jesus tells this story, what does he say to his host in verse 12? He says this, Jesus said to his host, when you give a lunch and a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbors.

If you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

[18 : 41] What's the difference between these groups? We see friends and siblings and family members and rich neighbors, they all have their lives put together, right?

Their lives are so put together they have the capacity maybe to invite you back. They have the ability to pay you back. These people can add value to your network.

They can open doors for you. It's this supportive alliance of people that can sort of do quid pro quo. Like, if you do something nice for me, I'll do something nice for you.

And Jesus raises the question. He says, but what if we live for something higher and something greater than right now payback with other people? What if we made sacrifices for a future reward?

In the resurrection of the righteous? And by the way, Jesus is not telling you to stop inviting your family over to dinner. Okay, I've got a birthday party later today at my sister's house.

[19 : 41] That is okay with Jesus. He's not giving you, you know, a carte blanche, like, just stop inviting the people in your family you don't like over to dinner. He's saying, in addition to inviting people who can pay you back, what if, like God, you begin to invite people who cannot pay you back?

And you see, who's on God's can't pay me back list? Well, we get it in Jesus' story in verse 21 where he says this. He says, the owner of the house became angry.

He ordered his servant, go out quickly to the streets and alleys of the town and bring in who? The poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. These are people who are clearly needy.

They are unfit for this feast, right? The poor are unwashed. The crippled are hobbling in on their crutches. The blind are being led in by others.

The lame can't walk in. They've got to be carried in by other people. And of course, to connect this back with the people making excuses, blind people can't even see a field even if they wanted to buy it.

[20 : 49] They can't buy it. Crippled people, they can't test oxen. They don't have that ability. Lame people typically don't get married. Poor people can't afford any of these things.

None of these people are people who are invited to feasts. Yet God is inviting them to his feast. Now, if I were God and, you know, the people that I had made in my image and I invited to my party rejected me and they snubbed me and humiliated me and ignored me and insulted me, I don't really think I'd be inviting more people to my party.

I would just say that's it. Party's over. But Jesus says God is so good and so gracious. God is so patient and so kind and he so wants his house to be full that he seemingly will include just about anyone.

Jesus is saying that no one is too low status or needy for God. God. No one is too dirty or wretched or miserable for God.

No one is too broken or outcast for God. He's saying the feast of God is going to be full of people who have nothing to offer God. God's feast of grace is not given to people who are fitting and who are worthy recipients.

[22 : 15] No, God's feast of grace is given precisely to those who are without worth. They're completely absent and empty of worth and his grace is just this incongruous gift.

It makes absolutely no sense. God gives his grace to people who can never even think to repay him. And what does Jesus want us to see about ourselves?

Jesus wants us to see that spiritually and morally we are the unwashed poor. that spiritually and morally we are the disabled.

That we are the unfit people at the bottom of the pile and that we are the unworthy people at the end of the line and that we do not deserve to be at God's feast.

But God in all of his grace he goes out into the city streets and he goes out into the country roads. He goes to the rural poor and the urban poor. He goes to everybody to gather us into his feast.

[23 : 20] And one of the ways that you know you are an unlikely guest is that you need to be compelled to come into the feast. Right? Jesus says in verse 22 what does he say? Sir, the servant said what you ordered has been done but there is still room and then the master of the house told his servant go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them persuade them to come in so that my house will be full.

Why do they need to be persuaded because they're surprised that they're even invited at all? Right? They know that they're undeserving. They know that they don't belong here.

There must be some mistake. Like why are you including desperate beggars in your feast? You know we can't pay back this host. You know we're not fit for this feast.

We're unwashed. We smell bad. We're in rags and tatters. We don't have decent robes. This gracious invitation cannot possibly be real.

What have I ever done for the host? Don't you see the state that I'm in? These people have to be compelled and someone needs to tell them you know you don't have to do anything.

[24 : 32] You're just welcomed and you're wanted just as you are. You see this feast of grace, this feast of salvation in the kingdom of God. It's totally free and it's completely prepared for you.

Come now for everything is ready. You don't need to do anything. You don't need to contribute anything. It's not a potluck where you bring a dish and add to the meal.

It's not a restaurant where you pick up a part of the tab and you pay your share. You just receive it without giving anything for it. And this is the first acid test that you know and you've come to know how poor and how disabled and how unworthy you are and how good and how gracious and how generous God is.

Do you have a sense of shock, a sense of astonishment that God's grace toward you is so radical it's almost hard to believe it?

Do you need someone to compel you to come in because you think it's just too good to be true? Do you need someone to just gently smile at you and take you by the arm and say come in you're included you belong.

[25 : 46] The host of the feast himself says that you are wanted and you are welcomed in his house and at his table. That's the first acid test that you know what grace is.

And the second acid test is the second test that you've experienced the grace of God and that is it has to do with who you invite into your life and to your table. Right? Just as the master of the feast wants to fill his house and his table Jesus also wants us to invite people into our lives and around our tables.

And he says when we are looking for people to invite we're not scanning for people who have their lives put together. We're not looking for people that we deem to be fitting and worthy candidates who can offer us something in return people who can pay us back people who can improve our lives because that is simply not what God has done for us.

Rather we're to graciously and generously invite the most unlikely guests who cannot pay us in the same way that God invited us by his incongruent grace by his uncalculating generosity that we could never repay.

So Jesus is telling us look around you look around you at the actually poor and the spiritually poor look around you at the actually disabled and the morally disabled and ask yourself what is keeping me from inviting them into my life and around my table and bringing them into the feast of Christ here in our community.

[27 : 23] Jesus says the one who invites people into your life and to your table like this will be rewarded not by the recipients themselves but by God himself at the resurrection of the righteous.

So Jesus says you've got to arrange your priorities around the feast you've got to invite unlikely guests to the feast and last thing we got basketball so I'm wrapping up.

You've got to take the lowest place at the feast. Take the lowest place at the feast. You know Lord's Supper or holy communion that we're about to receive it's given to us by Jesus as a foretaste of this coming feast in the kingdom of God this messianic banquet this feast to end all feasts where all of our hunger and our sadness and our tears and our shame will be gone.

But how are we to approach the Lord's Supper? How are we to come to holy communion? Well Jesus indicates that it's a feast for the humble and it's a feast for the lowly.

And what does Jesus say about the people sitting around the table? He says in verse 8 if you'll turn back to verse 8 he says when someone invites you to a wedding feast do not take the place of honor for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited so if the host who invited both of you will come and say to you give this person your seat then humiliated you will have to take the least important place but when you are invited take the lowest place so that when your host comes he will say to you friend move up to a better place then you'll be honored in the presence of all the other guests for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

[29:11] By now hopefully we can see that while Jesus is giving us solid counsel on how to behave at dinner parties right he's talking about something way more than just social etiquette and table manners isn't he what is he talking about he's talking about how we relate to God as our host and how we position and posture ourselves as the guests at his feast and Jesus talks when he talks he says this is a price a pricey feast it's a it's a precious wedding feast and hopefully you can see that this feast that God is inviting us to it's not one of those scratch meals where you say come over we'll just see whatever's in the fridge and in the cupboard and we'll whip something together no it's been prepared over a long period of time it's been prepared at great cost before the foundation of the world the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit took counsel together about this feast the one God and three persons agreed that they wanted you to come and be at this feast of grace and this feast of salvation the value of which is measured by how much it costs

God to put on and what does it cost God for this feast well it costs God the Father his most precious and dearly beloved and only Son and it costs Jesus all the glories of heaven it costs him humiliation absolute misery and humiliation on his cross bearing in his broken body the sins of the whole world dying in our place taking on all the condemnation and shame and wrath and punishment that we deserved so that you could be at this feast Jesus was cast out see that all the outcasts could come in Jesus became poor and he became crippled and he became blind and he became lame so that you could be brought in to the feast and not only has God prepared a feast for us at exorbitant cost to himself but all that you need and all that you could possibly want is provided at this feast right he has a means to transform us from being absolutely unfit and unworthy outcasts to coming in in a state of being his precious and his treasured friends right for all the unwashed poor he's got a wonderful bath in which he will baptize you and make you clean by the blood of Christ and for all those disabled in their rags and their tatters he covers our nakedness and he gives us a robe the robe of his very righteousness because you see

Jesus didn't live when he lived his life he wasn't living for fields and for oxen and for marriage what was he living for he was living exclusively and holy for the kingdom of God and when we come naked to him when we come in rags and tatters and unclean he puts that robe of his perfect righteousness around us and says you're ready now for the feast you see Jesus he became a poor and unworthy outcast on his cross so that he could cleanse us and clothe us in his own worthiness and so when we come to the Lord's supper when we come to holy communion this is for us a mini feast it's a feast that's a signpost to that kingdom that's already come and that is yet to come in the future the messianic age that's already begun and that will one day be consummated when Jesus returns and Jesus says that the best way to approach this feast is to humble yourself it's to say you know what

I'm going to take the lowest place I'm going to take the least important position because I know that I'm not even worthy to be at the table I know that I'm completely unqualified I'm just a desperate beggar all I bring to this feast is my hunger all I bring is my thirst the only way I'm here is because Jesus has cleansed me and he's clothed me to be here so friends if this is the attitude and the posture that we take we can hear the host of this feast say to us Jesus words in verse 10 if you look at verse 10 it says friend move up to a better place you see if we come humbly to this feast we hopefully can hear the master of the feast saying to us my precious friend my treasured friend what are you doing way down there come move up to a better place come sit right here next to me it's the affirmation it's the honor that all of our hearts so desperately and deeply desire and this encourages us

I think that those who humble themselves at this feast will ultimately be exalted by God and the feast to come so friends I want to reassure you that the God of all grace he's here and he himself is inviting you to his feast the feast of the Messiah the feast of grace the feast of salvation and what he's saying to us right now is come for everything has been prepared for you come for everything is now ready and I want my house to be full in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen Amen