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Luke 14:12-24 – *God's Guest List*

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¹² 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. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

¹⁸ “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

¹⁹ “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

²⁰ “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

²¹ “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

²² “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

²³ “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Oprah Winfrey; Serena Williams; George Clooney; Tom Hardy; David Beckham; Elton John...

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge; the Queen of England—

These are some of the names on the guest list at Harry and Meghan's 2018 Royal Wedding.

Now compare that to this guest list:

Tiny, Killer, Suicide, and Clara...

Some of the names of the people waiting in the food line...

Waiting to be served a warm meal at the Union Gospel Mission in Ft. Worth, TX in the movie "Same Kind of Different as Me."

And the contrast between the two guest lists couldn't be any starker:

Celebrities, friends and family of the bride and groom...

Decked out in formal attire—

Suits, dresses, heels, clutches—

Walking in front of cameras and adoring fans as they make their way to the church.

They know proper etiquette:

How to walk, proper greetings, which fork to use for the salad at dinner;

They talk about shows they've starred in...

And how happy they are to be at such a special event.

Compare that to the people sitting down to a meal at the Mission:

Tattered, probably sour smelling clothes...

Layered up to help get through the winter months;

Afraid or too ashamed to look up at those serving the meal;

Both arms resting on the table protecting their plate of food.

And at one point, a man barges into the dining room with a baseball bat...

Yelling, kicking over chairs, smashing a window...

Because someone stole his shoes.

A rather unpleasant lot...

Probably not the kind of people you'd find on your guest list at your next big dinner party.

Jesus looks around the table at the invited guests for the dinner he's attending...

And he sees the elite of society:

Prominent Pharisees, experts in the law, and himself...

A popular teacher who has been attracting large crowds.

It shouldn't come as a surprise...

Because this is how their culture works.

A host would arrange a big meal...

And on their guest list would be important people...

By important we mean wealthy and well-connected.

See, wealth and property were concentrated in the hands of a small percentage of people...

Which meant that most people needed assistance. (David DeSilva, *New Testament*)

So, there was a complex system of patrons and clients...

Those who had the money and power (patrons)...

And those who sought their favor (clients).

If you wanted to advance in society—

Land, food, better employment, or just favors—

You needed to play the game...

You had to be in good with a patron...

Earning their favor...

Doing good things for them...

Like having a meal and honoring them.

Now, knowing this is how society and advancement works—

Being in a place of favor with those who hold the money and power—

Who do you invite to your big dinner?

Tiny, Suicide, Clara, and Killer?

Or Oprah, Elton John, George Clooney, and the Royal Family?

The former group has nothing to offer—

They aren't well-connected to resources or anyone powerful—
So, what's the use of having them to your big dinner...

All they do is take up seats of potential guests you could be schmoozing and honoring.

It's not too different from how things work today...

We typically don't include those living in poverty, those in and out of the prison systems,
those suffering with serious mental illness, and those living with disabilities...

They're not too often a regular part of our lives.

Think about the last time you had a big meal or party...

Who was on your guest list?

Your family...

At least those you like;

Your close friends;

Maybe a work colleague or two;

People you're comfortable around.

And the last time you needed something—

Looking for a promotion or more work;

Trying to get your kids into a school or sports programs;

Looking for the best rates on home repairs or a vehicle—

Where do we turn?

To those who can benefit us.

What could this other group—

The Tinys, Killers, Suicides, Claras—

What could they possibly offer?

But the Oprahs, Clooneys, and Royal Family...

Well now they open us up to a whole new glittering, glamouring world...

Don't they?

Maybe it's a conscious thing—

Maybe it's subconscious—

But we have a tendency to associate with people like us...

Or people above us who have something we want or need.

Our passage today is like a muddy dog that runs through our clean house:

Jumping on our sofas;

Rolling around in our bed;

And tracking mud all over the floor.

If you allow it in...

These words of Jesus will convict and mess up the comfortable lives we have.

Because these words call us not just to *examine* our lives...

But to respond.

What are these words?

Jesus—

The super-polite dinner guest he is—

Confronts the host, this prominent Pharisee, about his guest list:

“When you give a big dinner...”

“Don’t invite your friends, brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbors.”

“Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, lame, and the blind.”

“Invite those people who cannot repay you...”

“Those people who will not help you advance.”

This goes against every instinct in our body:

Our instinct to keep ourselves safe—

“What happens if I let someone into my home who is unstable?”

“What happens if something comes up missing?”

It goes against our instinct to be comfortable—

“It’s been a hard week and all I want to do is relax...”

“With people who know me and get me.”

It goes against our instinct to be secure—

“What if my friends see me with this person?”

“What will this do to my reputation?”

“What am I giving up if I let this person into my life?”

In the movie, “Same Kind of Different As Me”...

Ron’s wife Debbie takes him to the Union Gospel Mission...

A place where those living on the streets come to get a warm meal.

Ron’s wife basically forces him to come here...

And Ron has to listen because Debbie just found out about his affair.

Ron wants nothing to do with this place or these people...

He’s a high-dollar art dealer...

With appointments to keep and contracts to sign.

He’s skeptical of the people he sees coming in...

Asking if he’s going to catch an infectious disease from them...

Asking why they’re not doing the work he’s doing.

He tells his wife...

“Just give me a number, I’ll write a check.”

She smiles, says thank you, and hands him his apron.

People who have nothing to offer this comfortable, well-off man...

Are infringing upon his life.

That’s Ron...

Maybe we see a little of ourselves in him.

Then there’s Ron’s wife, Miss Debbie.

Miss Debbie is as sweet as can be.

As she serves, Debbie asks people their names...

Taking a genuine interest in their lives.

This sweetness though is challenged by Suicide...

The one who came into the dining room with a baseball bat...

And smashed things up.

Suicide is very rough...

He has suffered a lot of harm from people in higher social classes...

Born to a family of share-croppers and victim of the racist-trauma of the South.

Suicide spent time in the infamous Angola prison in Louisiana—

Where he became a hardened criminal—

And now he's surviving on the streets...

Wanting nothing to do with Miss Debbie.

But Miss Debbie adds him to her guest list.

Through the course of the movie, Miss Debbie extends several invitations to Suicide:

First, he's sitting by himself at the table in the Mission's dining room.

Miss Debbie has her begrudging husband bring Suicide a plate of food...

Trying to slowly warm his heart.

Every time Suicide is in the meal line...

Miss Debbie asks for his name and how he's doing...

Eventually learning that his name is Denver.

Miss Debbie invites Denver to stay in their house when Denver's only friend dies.

Miss Debbie even adds Denver to her Christmas dinner guest list—

Which is quite exclusive—

Shared only with her husband, 2 kids, and Ron's parents.

Miss Debbie welcomes this man off the streets...

Who has no way of advancing her standing in society...

Or contributing to her material well-being.

There's a powerful scene at the end of the movie...

Miss Debbie's funeral.

See she had cancer and passed away at a young age.

While everyone is seated...

The back doors of the church open up...

And a long line of her friends—

The people who she got to know at the Mission—

Come up the isle each with a yellow rose, laying it up front.

You see just how many people's lives she touched...

How many people she invited into her love and life.

Her good friend Denver was asked to share some words:

“I never met Miss Debbie. Miss Debbie met me. I didn't want to know Miss Debbie or any other white woman for that matter. But ever since I knowed her, Miss Debbie want to be my friend. I still ain't figured out why she want to know a fellow like me. I sure am been nothing to be proud of. I was captive in devil's prison most of my life. Many folks see me there in lockup and pass me by. I don't blame em. I was not nice. Dangerous. And probably just as happy to stay in prison. But she was different. She seen me behind them bars and reached way down in her pocket. And pulled out a key God gave her to set me free. She's the only person to love me enough not to give up.

That's Miss Debbie.

That's a picture of God if you think about it.

We have nothing to offer God...

Nothing we do can advance his standing...

He doesn't need anything from us.

We don't deserve to be on his guest list for dinner.

In fact, we barge into the dining room with bat in hand and smash things up...

Creation, relationships, and everything else.

Yet God is gentle and persistent with us.

Welcoming us into places we don't belong...

Places where we have fellowship with him.

He welcomes us into his presence...

Into his home...

Into his inner sanctuary...

To sit at his dinner table.

Not because of anything we do.

Along with Denver we say, “I still ain’t figured out why God want to know a fellow like me.”

But this is who God is.

These are the people on his guest list:

The broken;

The despised;

The hurting;

Those who have need;

Those who know they have nothing to offer.

God says, “Come to my table.”

“Come get to know me.”

This is the shape of God’s kingdom.

This is what we join when give into his love.

We no longer have to worry about our own social standing...

Or who’ll take care of us.

We’re set free to expand our guest list...

To make room for those people already on God’s list.

Because what you’ll find...

Is that the broken, seemingly insignificant, who have nothing worldly to offer...

Are the ones that draw us nearest to God.

“Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” (Luke 9:48)

Whoever welcomes the one who has nothing to offer—

The one that the world would rather pass by—

Actually welcomes God himself...the savior of the world...

Who has everything to offer.

This week, I want you to wrestle with these two questions:

1. Am I on God’s guest list?

Do I know my need?

Do I know that I have nothing to offer to God but my broken spirit...

That I am totally dependent on his grace?

Do I trust that even though I bring nothing...

He delights in saving me...

In welcoming me to his table?

2. Who is on my guest list?

Amen.