11-22-26

The Interesting Dinner Guest

Luke 14: 12 – 14

Matthew 28:19 and 20 is called the Great Commission not because it is better than all the other commissions in the Bible, but because it includes all the other commissions.

Go and make disciples of all nations includes the whole of our duty once we understand what making a disciple means. It means two things:

1) Bringing people to Christ through faith.

2) Teaching them to do all that Jesus commanded.

The Great Commission is all-inclusive because it demands that we do all that Jesus commanded. Therefore, we are engaged in fulfilling the Great Commission whenever we help others obey Christ, and we will never be finished with the Great Commission until we do everything Christ has told us to do.

It is obvious, then, as a pastor that my agenda is already set for me. My sole task is to call people to Christ and then do all I can to help them keep all of Jesus' commandments.

In a matter of days, many of us will have a thanksgiving feast. In order to fulfill the Great Commission that we observe everything Jesus commanded, we need to know whom Jesus wants us to invite to that feast. So, I want to talk about this for a bit this morning.

Our text is Luke 14:12–14.

It is Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and Jesus has been invited to dinner by one of the leaders among the Pharisees, the most zealous of all law-keepers among the Jews.

There is no evidence that I know of that Jesus was ever invited back a second time to a Pharisee's house. And it's not hard to see why.

It seems like every time Jesus opens his mouth, he addresses somebody's hypocrisy. This can be very annoying.

There never was another man whose mouth was more closely tied to the human heart.

Was there ever a word that came out of Jesus' mouth that did not touch the ultimate issues of the soul?

No man ever spoke like this man. *"For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."* (John 18:37).

So, when Jesus spoke out at a Saturday dinner and when we hear him through the gospels today, a division is created. Those who are "on the side of truth" listen and obey. *"My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me"* (John 10:27, 4).

Those who are not of the truth do not have ears to hear or eyes to see. Jesus says to them, *"Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say . . . He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God"* (John 8:43, 47).

So, let's take heed how we hear the words of Jesus, lest we be found indifferent or antagonistic to his teaching and so prove ourselves to be outside the fold.

I pray that the way we hear today will prove that we are all among the number of whom Jesus said, *"Father, I have given them the words which you have given me, and they have received them and know the truth that I came from you."*

So, the first thing Jesus does at this Saturday dinner is heal a man. Perhaps he was lying outside the Pharisee's house as they entered (like Lazarus used to lay at the rich man's gate).

Jesus asked the law-experts and Pharisees if they thought healing on the sabbath was lawful. They did not answer, but their silence clearly answered for them: No, it's not lawful.

In **Luke 13:14**, the synagogue ruler had said, *"There are six days for work. So, come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."*

And so Jesus says here at the dinner the same thing he said there in the synagogue: *"If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?"* (14:5).

No answer.

Jesus leaves it for them and for us to draw the inference, namely: You law-experts and Pharisees have a keen interest in your own welfare. When the law seems to stand between you and the safety of your valuable ox, you have no difficulty breaking the law.

The preservation of your own comfort is clearly a higher commitment than rigorous Sabbath keeping. But when it comes to another person's need, whose illness is no skin off your nose, then the law becomes conveniently rigid to protect you from any involvement.

O, the wickedness of religious people whose god, is not the Lord but selfish convenience, and for whom the holy law of God is either rigid or flexible depending on whether there is something to be gained.

So, it's clear, isn't it?

I hope no one will go out of here today without understanding this: **We can be at our furthest from God in the very exercise of our religion!**

Man is at his worst when he uses his religion to protect himself from the inconvenience and disturbance of needy strangers.

This is the first thing Jesus says when he comes to dinner. Not the most ingratiating thing to do to your host, but perhaps the most loving.

The second thing Jesus does is to address the pride of the dinner guests right there in front of everybody. He has been sitting there watching them come in. And what does he look for?

How they are dressed?

Where they are from?

What are their jobs? No.

He looks for what they love.

Jesus always watches until he knows where our treasure is. Because where our treasure is, is where our heart is, and Jesus wants our heart!

So, Jesus watches and he sees what their treasure is:

They love the praise of men.

They love to be esteemed for occupying the seats of honor.

And he watches how they move in and out of conversations, weaving their way unnoticed to the best seats.

Nobody fools Jesus. He is master, absolute master, of every situation!

What does Jesus think about the guest's whose treasure is the praise of men?

In short, he thinks they will go to hell if their values don't change.

Listen to what he said in two other places about this form of idolatry:

Luke 11:43: *"Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the market places."*

Luke 20:46, 47: *"Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor*

at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show, make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

Two things go hand in hand with loving the places of honor at banquets:

Exploitation of the weak and condemnation.

If your treasure is the praise of men and a widow's house stands in your way, you will destroy it. But in the end, your own house will collapse in the flood of God's judgment.

So, Jesus here says in **Luke 14:11,** *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

If you pursue the seats of honor on earth you will have no seat at all in heaven (cf. **Matthew 18:3; 5:20**).

Now one would think Jesus has ruffled enough feathers for one dinner:

Exposing the legalist's ability to twist the law in order to protect their selfish ambitions.

Exposing the pride of those who crave the praise of men.

You would think by this point the party would be over. But he's not even done yet!

He also says to the host, *"When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers, or 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."* (Luke 14:12-14)

Up till now Jesus has talked to the guests but now he turns to the host.

"Don't touch that snake, lest it bite you and you die."

"Don't climb that rope, lest it break and you fall."

"Don't invite your friends and brothers and relatives and rich neighbors to dinner, lest you be repaid in kind."

Talk about a counter- intuitive argument!

"Danger! Repayment ahead!"

"Warning! This repayment may be dangerous to your health!"

Who on earth talks like this?

Somebody whose kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

Somebody who knows that 1,000 years on this earth is like yesterday when it is gone (Psalm 90:4);

Somebody who knows that our life is but a mist that appears and in a moment vanishes away (James 4:14);

Who knows that he who saves his life now will lose it later, and he who loses it now in love will save it later (Mark 8:35)

And who knows that there will be a resurrection unto eternal life - a resurrection of the just to live with God a million millennia of eons.

Jesus is the man.

No man ever spoke like this man. And the people who call him Lord ought not to be like any other people.

Take heed how you hear. There are some whose first and only reaction to Jesus' words will be: "Well, he can't mean that, because then we would have no more church suppers, no more Sunday School socials, no more family reunions, and even the Lord's Supper would be wrong."

Then, having thus defused the text and bent the sword of the Spirit, they move on to the next passage and right on through the New Testament justifying themselves and, just like the Pharisees, manipulating the law of Christ to preserve their unruffled tradition and convenience.

There is no better defense against the truth than a half-truth.

And the half-truth is, Jesus does not intend to end all family meals and gatherings of friends.

But the truth is: there is in every human heart a terrible and powerful temptation to live by the law of earthly repayment, the law of reciprocity.

There is a subtle and relentless inclination in our flesh to do what will make life as comfortable as possible and to avoid what will inconvenience us or agitate our placid routine or add the least bit of tension to our Thanksgiving dinner.

Every Christian I know must do battle every day so as not to be enslaved by the **universal tendency to always act for the greatest earthly payoff.**

I stress the danger of living for earthly repayment (for ease, convenience, comfort, tranquility) because Jesus stressed it.

Listen to these other sayings. **Luke 6:24**: *"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort."*

The rich are condemned because the use of their money showed where their heart was: they used it to secure their lives and pad themselves with comfort and luxury instead of using it to meet the needs of the suffering.

Jesus takes this saying from **Luke 6:24** and makes a parable out of it in **Luke 16:19ff**. You know the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

"*There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid lay a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.*

So, he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony."

Why didn't the rich man give Lazarus the crumbs from his table?

Because Lazarus was in no position to repay.

The rich man's life was governed by the law of reciprocity - by the earthly benefits he would receive in return for all his dealings.

He wore the finest clothes and feasted sumptuously and did not inconvenience himself with the poor, sick man at his very door.

And so, he went to hell where everybody will go who uses his money to feast sumptuously with comfortable, respectable guests instead of using it to alleviate suffering.

When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

You will be blessed because **they cannot** repay you!

You will be *blessed* because **they cannot** repay you!

What an amazing thing for Jesus to say!

Often, we brace ourselves for some good old-fashioned self-denial.

We batten down the hatches to exercise some disinterested benevolence.

And Jesus turns around and says: Your self-denial for the poor will bring you great blessing. Your benevolence is not, nor ever could be, disinterested.

Indeed, your eternal interest is at stake. *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35).

"If you lose your life (in love) for my sake, you will save it" (Mark 8:36).

So in the end, for those who obey, there is no self-sacrifice.

Who wouldn't count everything as rubbish in order to gain Christ?

So, why does it make such an eternal difference whom you invite to Thanksgiving dinner?

It's not so much that this one afternoon is all-determining.

The reason it makes an eternal difference is that, along with many other occasions, it reveals where our treasure is.

Is Jesus, with his commands and promises, more valuable to us than tradition and convenience and earthly comfort?

Is He our treasure or is this world our treasure?

This question is not decided during an altar call during a church service.

It's decided at Thanksgiving dinner, and hour by hour every day, by whether we are willing to inconvenience ourselves for those who can't repay, or whether we avoid them and so preserve our cherished routine.

It matters who we invite to Thanksgiving dinner because it says something about where our treasure is.

Thank you, Lord for reminding us of this today. Amen.