

July 22, 2018 The Guest Pt. 5 Luke 14:1-6

It is easy to accept an invitation to dinner from someone whose company you enjoy...a friend. One of the insights we have to add to the list from these portions of Scripture which set the ministry of Jesus in the context of HIS being a dinner guest is this one. He was just as eager, and just as willing to accept an invitation to dinner from someone who was not only not a friend of HIS, or a friend of one of HIS friends. Jesus accepted invitations to dinner with those who sought to destroy HIM and HIS ministry.

This week's portion involves the fact that Jesus was invited to dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee. It is not the first story of Jesus the dinner guest we have looked at that placed him in the home of those who sought to harm HIM. Jesus took risks. Invitations were readily accepted even when the offer came from those Jesus knew to be critical of HIM, HIS teaching, and HIS ways. Jesus had a unique gift. When doors were opened, HE walked through them. HE saw them as opportunities to advance the Kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus wanted to save everyone, not just the poor, not just the sick, not just the weak. When HE was invited to the home of someone who was prosperous, comfortable, healthy, wealthy, a mover and a shaker in the society of Israel in HIS time...Jesus was very likely to accept. HE would place HIMSELF at the disposal of those who requested that HE come and eat at their

homes, even when they were “carefully watching” Him, in order to bring a legal case against HIM.

In Luke 14 we see Jesus not only in the house of a Pharisee, but a prominent Pharisee. The KJ Version says he was one of the chief Pharisees. He was at very least a leader in his order. He may well have been a member of the Sanhedrin, the Council which met in Jerusalem, and which in the end made the decision that Jesus must die for the good of the people. The meal which Jesus is invited to as a guest, takes place on the Sabbath. This means there was religious significance to the meal itself. And, if you know anything about Jewish culture, it means that it was going to be a really great dinner. It is also frankly true: this was a setup.

The Pharisees were not simple and they were not stupid. They knew that Jesus would come if HE was invited. They knew HE would bring HIS disciples. And they knew that having HIM on their turf, they would have every advantage possible, in terms of watching Jesus, and examining HIS doctrine. It is not that there is one chief Pharisee here as host. There are a lot of them. And they are all carefully watching Jesus because they expect HE will do provocative things. They are literally hoping HE will do something that indicates HE does not see the Sabbath as a day of rest...as they define rest... And that is what the invitation is all about.

I cannot prove it from the text, but I believe the man who suffered from dropsy was a plant. Dropsy is a disease in

which fluid gathers in the cavities of the body and between tissues. The man was seated right there in front of Jesus. His symptoms were obvious to Luke who was in fact a physician, as well as a follower of Jesus. And this is why I think he was a plant. And that all of this is part of an elaborate effort to find fault with Jesus doctrine, HIS practice, and to see HIM as a threat to Israel, Jewish faith, and Jewish traditions.

This is an instance with one of the longest teaching portions attached to it. Most of chapter 14 is a presentation of Jesus words during the dinner at the house of this prominent Pharisee where Jesus is being carefully watched. Jesus makes an observation. He noticed that when it came to seating arrangement, people have picked the places of honour at the table. He tells them not to think so highly of themselves. Imagine how that went over. He tells them very practically, to take seats of lesser status. That way they will never be asked to give up their seat for someone else who in the view of the host is more important. He is talking about humility.

The man with dropsy was prominent enough in the circle of the Pharisees and this particular host of the Sabbath banquet, to get a prime seat...right in front of Jesus. And if it was not the sick man's choice to be seated in that "front row" it had to be the host, the prominent Pharisee at whose house this meal occurs. Either way, the host had to be aware of this man's placement. The enemies of Jesus ministry and mission were dangling the bait where they were certain Jesus could not help

but see it. They anticipated that if Jesus noticed this man HE would heal him. That's why I conclude the man with dropsy was a plant, and this Sabbath feast was a setup.

Luke tells us Jesus did notice the man with dropsy. He not only notices the man who is ill, HE sees through the plot. He sees through it so fully he asks the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law the pointed question of the moment. "Is it lawful to heal on he Sabbath or not?" Their silence is proof of two things. They suddenly know that the guest at this Sabbath dinner is aware of exactly what is going on. As a religious meal, it is a sham. They have taken everything they hold dear about the Sabbath and set it aside, in order to plot murder. And not only that, they suffer the surprise that Jesus is aware not only of their hatred toward HIM and HIS ministry, but HIS remarkable talent for reading the hearts and the minds of those who would do evil on the Sabbath.

Which really means they are confirmed in their conviction that Jesus is more dangerous than they ever dared to suspect. As a boy, I was a fan of Fran Striker. If you do not know or recognize that name, Fran Striker is the novelist who created that hero in western literature known as "The Lone Ranger." I began by borrowing the novels in the Lone Ranger series from the Public Library. Then I began collecting them to read and re-read. There was a period in my youth when the greatest joy on my birthday was unwrapping a present only to discover that beneath the tissue paper...The Lone Ranger and

Tonto were still riding, and bringing justice to the old west. My favourite part was always the way the novels ended. Someone in the crowded street in a small western town would ask the question, "Who was that masked man." And over the top of that conversation would come the voice..."Hi you Silver away!" And someone else would answer... "He's the Lone Ranger."

It is revealing that the Pharisees could see all these realities and truths about Jesus and yet refuse to recognize HIS divine identity. "As the old saying goes, there are none so blind as those who will not see." Jesus turns to the man who has dropsy, and HE takes hold of him. And then Jesus heals the man. And Jesus sends the man out of the gathering, away from the banquet, away from this environment that is rife with conspiracy. Turning back to the crowded room and HIS host, Jesus asks a very practical question. "If you have a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath, what do you do? Either out of love for the child or because of the value in money of the ox, you will immediately mount a rescue action. And the audience is silent. Then he teaches on humility, being humble, because the assembly has been seated according to status and reputation. "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Then Jesus turns to this prominent Pharisee who is today's host, and he delivers a lecture that amounts to "when you want to celebrate do not invite your friends, or your relatives, or your rich neighbours, because they will be likely to

invite you back to their homes. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. God will bless you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

And someone seated at the table with Jesus commented, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God!" In reply, Jesus told the story immortalized in our time by the Medical Mission Sisters in their song, The Wedding Banquet with the the chorus, "I cannot come. I cannot come, Do not trouble me now, I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow." Luke says that everything Jesus said in what we call chapter 14, was said because a Pharisee who thought he was important held a banquet and invited Jesus to be the guest.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus remind us over and over again who you actually are...the Lord our God, the Word made flesh, the embodiment of the Holy Spirit, our Saviour and our Lord. Invite us to learn the limitation of religious traditions and values. Create in us the desire to walk humbly among our neighbours and even more humbly with YOU. Lord grant us the capacity to love as you have loved us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen