

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 28, 2022

Luke 14:1, 7-14

“Receive the Invitation”



St. John United Church of Christ

Liturgy - Rev. Maren C. Tirabassi

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Welcome to the banquet of hope,
the open bar of prayer,
the “anonymous” circle of acceptance.

We come because we are invited.

Welcome to a fiesta of joy
or a mercy meal of tenderness,
where every seat is a place of honor.

We come because we are invited.

Welcome to a party for God’s love-reveal,
where all seating is a circle,
and karaoke is never necessary
because we sing our own stories.

**We come because we have an invitation,
not on paper, simply our names.**

***INVOCATION:**

God, we come this gathering of community where
there are no barriers, and all our abilities are
celebrated as gifts. We come to receive your
hospitality of caring for each one of us and to learn
from you how to offer such a celebration to stranger,
friend, chosen family, those whose faces are
unfamiliar to us, and the face who meets us in the
mirror. Amen.

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

God, sometimes we say, “I’m too busy,”
to invitations to kindness, friendship, or activism,
or pretend to be “too busy,” and avoid

being indebted, pitied, or rubbing elbows with those who make me uncomfortable. Sometimes we accept an invitation to be involved, celebrate with someone, or just have coffee, but back out or “no-show.” Forgive us when we skip your parties.

God, sometimes we are “imperfect guests,” wanting to be the center of attention, and other times we insist on always being host, giver, one in control, receiver of praise and gratefulness. Forgive us when we fail in gratitude or generosity. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

God loves, invites, nudges, embraces us in all our resistance to simply hold a balloon of joy and clap at the candles of another’s cake. We are forgiven; a plate is set for us.

EPISTLE READING: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

The Words of the Apostle Paul

Our acts of service and sacrifice

13 Keep loving each other like family. ² Don’t neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. ³ Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with

them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place. ⁴ Marriage must be honored in every respect, with no cheating on the relationship, because God will judge the sexually immoral person and the person who commits adultery. ⁵ Your way of life should be free from the love of money, and you should be content with what you have. After all, he has said, *I will never leave you or abandon you.* ⁶ This is why we can confidently say, *The Lord is my helper, and I won’t be afraid. What can people do to me?*

⁷ Remember your leaders who spoke God’s word to you. Imitate their faith as you consider the way their lives turned out. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

¹⁵ So let’s continually offer up a sacrifice of praise through him, which is the fruit from our lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Don’t forget to do good and to share what you have because God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 14:1, 7-14**

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14 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to share a meal in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees, they were watching him closely.

Lessons on humility and generosity

⁷ When Jesus noticed how the guests sought out the best seats at the table, he told them a parable. ⁸ “When someone invites you to a wedding celebration, don’t take your seat in the place of honor. Someone more highly regarded than you could have been invited by your host. ⁹ The host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give your seat to this other person.’ Embarrassed, you will take your seat in the least important place. ¹⁰ Instead, when you receive an invitation, go and sit in the least important place. When your host approaches you, he will say, ‘Friend, move up here to a better seat.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹ All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

¹² Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, “When you host a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. ¹³ Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected.”

MESSAGE: “What is your RSVP to God’s banquet?”

As you heard, this lesson from Jesus is all about humility. I feel like I’m “preaching to the choir” as the saying goes. After all, I don’t see any of you fighting for the front pews.

Jesus told this parable at a feast and it may well be that he was describing something that actually happened. It was indeed the kind of thing that often did happen, at least in Jesus’ time.

Sometimes I think it is difficult for you and I to relate to the culture and practices of the first century. What the people of Jesus’ time think and do are completely foreign to us today. When we go to a wedding reception, unless we are the bride or groom or in the wedding party, we don’t grab the seats at the head table. Thank you, Emily Post, for teaching us manners.

However, I don’t think it’s just a matter of etiquette. One of the good things in our western culture is how we treat other people. Some cultures in our world may be different. But most of us think that every person we see is important in some way. We wouldn’t purposefully knock someone off the sidewalk if we thought we needed more room to walk. We’d say “excuse me” or we’d step off the curb for a few seconds or maybe stop and step aside. We respect other people.

(Now I have to stop myself for a minute. Every day we read in the paper or on the news that innocent people are shot and killed just because the shooter had no respect for their victim. I don't think I would invite them to my banquet, but it happens in our world all the time; at funerals, at weddings, at birthday parties, at schools. One difference is that there are guns on the streets now as opposed to Jesus' day. Yet the lack of humility is the same.)

But I digress. The ordinary people of the first century were not saints; they showed their lack of humility in different ways, as Jesus is pointing out in our scripture texts we read today. There was definitely a lack of common goods and services. There were poor people and rich people; there was no middle class, whatever that is today. I think most of us can put food on the table and buy new shoes if we need them. Not so for the people around Jesus. Yet they shared what little they did have.

There is another suggestive point in this parable. It asks the question – does our own judgment of our worth coincide with the judgment of your fellow citizens of the world? The man in our parable took the highest place uninvited set a considerable value upon his worth; but it was a judgment which was not endorsed by the fellow guests. How embarrassing?

I get the impression from Jesus that those rich people didn't share very much. And what they did share, they made sure everyone in town knew about it. No humility at all.

If they showed no humility to those around them, what about their attitude toward God? Perhaps they think that because they are rich, God loves them more than the poor people. It's one thing to have money and share it with others; donate to charities or start a foundation or give to medical research to help all of us. Many are generous anonymously.

So, what is humility? Webster says, "freedom from pride or arrogance." When in doubt, let's look to our Bible. "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom."

— Proverbs 11:2. In Sirach 3:18 we can read, "However great you become, **humble yourself** more, and you will find favor before the Lord." In James 4:10 it reads, "**Humble** yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

What's more important? To be lifted up by your fellow human beings or to be lifted up by God? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

Here we are, God. We stand in need of your care. Humility is not easy. There are times when we want a pat on the back, but actually a smile from you would be better. The nuns at Catholic hospitals used to say, "All for Jesus." And that's how we should live our lives. Thank you for helping us achieve that as we change our focus to you instead of our own needs for recognition.

We thank you for your kind invitation for us to remain in your love and guidance. May we serve others at that feast you offer us.

Loving God, increase in us the kindness that is blessed in the experience of sharing. Use our modest gifts for your greater purpose.

Today we also pray for the great family of your church, called and named in Christ Jesus. May all your children, confessing you as our parent in heaven, make it evident that they are brothers and sisters of Jesus, by thoughtfulness and love for one another.

Bless our brothers and sisters struggling from the effect of the floods and fire in our land. May the rest of us give generously to help them, knowing that they would do the same for us. That's why we are your people. We remember to love others as we love you.

We remember all the people on our prayer list that they may hear and feel your presence with them.

We pray all these things in the name of the one who taught us to pray. . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

***BENEDICTION:**

May you be blessed when you sit at fine tables of welcome and when you spread the picnic blanket of peace. May you be blessed in giving and receiving, not repaid, but your hearts repaired.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Ceri Schutzenhofer, Theo Malley, Jane Reiss, Gary Whitkas, Sandy Fort, Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams

CONDOLENCES to the family and friends of Donna Logsdon whose services were held here on Friday.