

¹⁵ One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶ Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. ¹⁷ At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' ¹⁹ Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' ²⁰ Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' ²² And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' ²³ Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

No one likes to be snubbed. I myself was snubbed this week. Had a lunch appointment with someone, confirmed that morning, took it as a perfect opportunity to choose a restaurant I had seen and wanted to try...showed up right on time...and sat. And waited. And sat and waited. And endured the stares of others that seemed to say aloud, "What are you doing there...BY YOURSELF?" and the constant check-in of the server, "You wanna go ahead and order?" "No, no, she'll be here soon." I got snubbed. Nobody likes getting snubbed.

Our parable's host got snubbed. Bigtime. A wealthy one he was, no doubt, with space and staff and seating for a large crowd. He did what was culturally expected in that day, as it is in ours--he sent a "Save the Date." He got the word out that the party of the century was coming. And the guests didn't say anything at that point; they didn't decline that first invitation; no they waited until the tables were set, the napkins were folded into delicate swan or peacock shapes, and the champagne was already losing its fizz, they waited until THEN, to say no. They waited until it would hurt the most, cost the most; they waited until it was too late to invite someone else, too late to invite the B list or enact the contingency plan. Then they snubbed him.

What made it worse was the excuses--these go right up there with washing your hair and organizing your sock drawer. The first person says "I've bought a piece of land and I must go see it; please accept my regrets." His politeness is about the only the going for him because the guy must be lying through his teeth; who buys a piece of land without seeing it first? Who doesn't go out there and tromp around, check it out before signing the deal. Snubbed. He's lying, and the next guy surely is too: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out." Really? Five yoke of Oxen, that means five pair of oxen, ten oxen, and you're just now going to try them out? Really? Snubbed again.

And then there's the newlywed. "I just got married." He's more direct about it, less polite. There's no "Please accept my regrets" from this guy--he just names it. I cannot come. Snubbed, yet again.

And so what does the host do? Well, he skips the B list and heads straight for the C, D, and F lists. "Go to the street--get the people off the street--the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. And when there's still not enough you must compel them to come. The show must go on, this party. will. happen.

But the biggest snub doesn't go to the host--the guy **in** the parable. It goes to the guy **outside** the parable--the guy who initiated the parable in the first place--the one who began our passage today by declaring "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God." Now, if we back up to the rest of chapter 14, here's what we know about this guy: we know he's got a seat at the table for sabbath meal with one of the top leaders of the Pharisees--Jesus implies that all of the guests are the hosts family, friends, and rich neighbors; we know that he and the other guests at the table had strategically placed themselves in seats of honor; and we know that he, along with the others, was watching Jesus' every move. His opening comment is "How fortunate the one who gets to eat dinner in God's kingdom!" Now who do you think he meant? Who do you think he was counting on sitting in the seat of honor at that table?

You see this is where Parables get tricky--Jesus invites us into these stories--stories that don't need to be true, but are big enough to enter into, to walk around in, something Barbara Brown Taylor compares to a dream. Jesus invites us into the parable, but what we find there catches us by surprise. This guy declares how great it will be one day to sit at the banquet table of God, but when he gets into the story, when he walks in the door of this parable, he doesn't recognize anyone at the table.

Poor, Crippled, Blind, Lame. People found on the roads and the byways, you can almost hear this man as he listens to Jesus tell it, you can almost hear him gasp-- "`<gasp>`...sinners!"

Yep, sinners. Tax collectors. Unclean people. Those whom God has obviously rejected. At this point in Jesus' ministry, tax collectors and sinners are following Jesus around more and more, listening to his teaching, straining, yearning to hear more, and it's not hard to imagine why. Since chapter 5 he's been accused of eating with them. He called one tax collector to be his disciple, he allowed one of the she-sinners to wash his feet with her tears and her hair, and he has made it abundantly clear--I have not come for the righteous, but for sinners. The people Jesus hangs out with...Jesus' people...are the sinners. And his response to those sinners? This is important: his response is not to scold them. He may long for their repentance, for a change of ways, but his impulse is not to correct them. His impulse is to eat with them. And now, now he has taken it to the extreme. Not only does he eat with them on earth, in this life, but his parable indicates that they will sit at his table and fill God's banquet hall in the life to come.

Scandal!

Who is it for us? Who are the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, the underdogs and the unlikely's...the sinful ones of our world? When we walk around in this parable, this dream, and peek in the door of the banquet, who are we shocked to find, seated at the table? If Jesus were travelling through towns and villages in Israel today, telling this parable, I have to say, I wonder...I wonder

if the seats of the parable's banquet table might be filled with Palestinians. If Jesus were sharing this parable in our own homes, at our own dinners, who would it be? Who would be on the new guest list, when the invited guests have turned him down, who might the host round up and bring in at the last minute? Perhaps the trafficking victim? Perhaps the trafficker. Perhaps the undocumented immigrant? Perhaps the coyote who brought them here. People on the highways and byways, people under bridges and overpasses, people in the ER with tuberculosis, people on the "most wanted" list, people we'd all rather avoid...people we get uncomfortable talking about...much less talking to.

You see, the snub for the man who started this whole thing is not that he cannot find a place for himself at the banquet table; the snub is that when Jesus tells him who is there, he has to think twice about whether he really wants to go after all. The question for us is not whether we have a seat at the table--we do! You do! The question is whether you really want one. Is this the crowd we want to run with? Are these the people we want to be seen with? Is this the party we really want to go to?

In a way, Jesus gives the man--and us--an out! Like those people who hang back to RSVP for the party because they are waiting to see who else will be there...Jesus gives us the guest list, he tells us who will be there, and he leaves us to realize, this banquet, this party...may not be the party I thought I was going to...and he leaves us to decide, do I still want to go? Do I really want to hang out with these people? Because, according to Luke, if we want to hang out with Jesus, then we may not have much choice. Because this is who Jesus hangs out

with; this is who Jesus invites; this is what Jesus came for--to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free..." We seek to be and to make followers of Jesus, and the truth is, when you follow Jesus, you will often look up and find yourself among friends you would not have chosen, in places you'd rather not go. But funny enough, if you stay there long enough, you find that you fit right in. Because you got in on a ticket of grace--and by that grace you may find that you, too, are a most unlikely banquet guest, welcomed at the table, to feast on the bread of life.

Summary: Like the host of the great banquet, God invites all to the table—even the most undesired and unexpected guests. The question for us is whether we want to take part in a party of such misfits!