

Hey, It's Not about Me!

Maundy Thurs. – 03/28/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 14:12-14 Pastor Keith Besel

[Literal Translation from the original Greek:] ¹² **“And [Jesus] went on speaking to those who had invited Him, “Whenever you prepare a breakfast or dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, so at some time they might not also invite you in return and it becomes a repayment. ¹³ But whenever you prepare a banquet, invite the poor, the disabled, the lame, the blind; ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they do not have the ability to repay you; for it will be repaid to you in the resurrection of the righteous.”**

Introduction

✘ One verse after that text Jesus makes a significant declaration, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (Lk. 14:15).

I. Jesus is talking about Himself

✘ So who is Jesus talking about here in this Biblical text tonight? It's you and me of course! Right?

→ Yet Jesus is very clear as He speaks to those who had gathered at the house of one of the ruling Pharisees on a Sabbath; at a meal to which He, Jesus had been invited...He is very clear that any of us who view a meal that we have been invited to as an investment, then how is that gift? Why would we tell the host, “Thank you” if we know that the host expects us to repay the invitation in the near future?

→ Any terrorist or predator can play that “tit-for-tat” game. Really, if the main purpose of the feast is that we will be required to earn our invitation in some way, how is that love? How is that a gift?

→ So, just as you are about to be amazed at how accurately Jesus teaches you about you, it suddenly hits: “Wait a minute Jesus! You weren't talking about me, were You?”

✘ Let me explain. In Matthew 5:20 Jesus told us that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. Most people instinctively bristle at this and the other passages in Scripture like it because our original sin just naturally wants to think that God is trying to get something from us; that this kind of statement is some kind of good-works ultimatum.

→ But, you see, when He says that our righteousness must surpass that of the Jewish leaders, He isn't giving us an ultimatum. He's actually giving us Himself. As Paul says in Romans 3:21, “Now a righteousness from God has been made known, apart from law, to which the law and the prophets testify”. And in 1 Corinthians 1:30 we are told straight out that “Christ Jesus became to us...righteousness.” So any righteousness that you and I might possibly have is actually Jesus and His righteousness wrapped around us!

✘ I've said it before just as any faithful pastor before me or after would say, “The whole Bible is about Jesus – first and foremost.”

→ Take for example His teaching in Luke 18:25, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” On the surface that sounds like Jesus is trying to get us to understand how hard it will be for us to get into heaven; that we must be beaten into poverty and overcome every trouble in this world with absolute perfection. But, wait a minute! It was only two verses later that Jesus said, “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (Lk. 18:27).

→ You see, He wasn't preparing us for how hard it would be for us to get into heaven. He was preparing us to see how hard it would be for Him! Jesus was the only one who was truly rich. He was the only one for whom it was truly hard to enter heaven.

✘ There isn't one person ever who makes it into heaven except as a free, undeserved gift of Jesus – everyone that is except for Jesus! He gets into heaven at His ascension only after He was first reduced by torture to a battered and bloodied corpse hanging on a cross.

→ And anyone else; everyone else that makes it into heaven is utterly undeserving of the gift; completely poor and “penniless” in the commerce of works or words or thoughts that are “deserving” of heaven. Yet they do get in; we get into heaven because of His blood pouring out of His body and covering every one of our wretched sins. For us, and for all who enter heaven it can't be any “easier”!

II. Jesus doesn't invite His equals to His feast.

✘ In this text before us this night Jesus teaches us all how to give a feast; who gets invited, and why. “Hey, wait a minute Pastor. Are you saying that the whole Gospel leads us to a feast?”

→ Yes, I am. In fact, the whole salvation history – Old and New Testament together, leads to a feast, just as the entire Divine Service leads to a feast. You see, Jesus leads us all by example, with His feast; this feast right here on this altar!

✘ Now think of that first “Maundy Thursday” when Jesus celebrated the Passover Meal for the last time here on earth. Did He invite His equals? If He did, who would those equals be? The only options are the highest Holy Spirit and the Almighty God, the Father.

→ If Jesus gave feasts the way that we do, we would have all been bound hand and foot in the outer darkness, where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth.

✘ Here on earth Jesus had no true equals. You and I can't repay Him for this feast. It's impossible for us mere men and women. This is, in every sense, a charity banquet. You, and everyone else, is in debt when you eat here. You will always be in debt, and there's nothing you or anyone else can do about it.

✘ Does Jesus invite the rich? Does He call those whose lives are already fulfilled to His table? No. Does He call those can live without Communion and only come just for fun? No. Does He call those who are pleased and fully satisfied with their Christian life? No.

→ I really mean that. Friends, if this feast here is no big deal to you; nothing special, you're not invited. If you can't honestly say that Holy Communion is the absolute highlight of your life, while the very body and blood of the Supreme Being sits here on this humble altar, then don't come.

✘ If you or I think Jesus is only investing in us, on the off chance that our future actions and words will somehow be a sound investment and bring about a perfect repayment for this meal, then folks, we don't really know what we eat and drink at this feast.

→ It's not a matter of, “All He asks is that we do our part.” That would be an insult that breaks so many commandments. You and I have already done our part. We've made our bed – fully contaminated with sin, and Jesus is the One who slept in it. “Crucified, dead, and buried.” If you are bringing anything to this table other than your poor, crippled, lame, blind and sin-filled self, then stay away.

III. Are you Poor, Disabled, Lame, Blind? Come!

✘ Jesus said in verse 13, “invite the poor, the disabled, the lame, the blind...”.

- ✘ So, are you poor? Do you find that the longer you know Jesus, the less you find you have to give Him? Are you appalled when you realize that you are becoming more of a contradiction instead of more comfortable; that the gulf between what you are and what you should be might have actually widened and deepened? After all this time, all of the Bible reading, receiving forgiveness, being graced with the Holy Spirit, making promises, have you realized that you have nothing to offer God at this moment but empty pockets, again?
 - ➔ The further you go in life, does it seem like all your hopes and plans to finally make something of yourself spiritually and match up with God's expectations have blown up in your face? When you look in the mirror each day are you no holier than your last sin?
 - ➔ With as much as God has forgiven you, blessed you, assured you, and held you, you should be rich in grace by now, right? But, alas – you still arrived here tonight empty. When it comes to righteousness, you and I are here declaring bankruptcy again.
- ✘ Well, only the bankrupt are invited and welcomed here by Jesus. It's time to give up on "doing your part." We all must dine here for free. Every one of us is a constant drain on Christ. That's the reason that His side was pierced. So, are you poor? Then come. There's a place just for you right here at this table!
- ✘ And now, are you disabled? Not very good at being a Christian? Not cut out for church life? Have you got that one really bad joint, or arm or leg? And I don't mean on your physical body, but that one really disappointing truth about you. Yes, you know exactly where you are crippled, and it is the grief of your life, the ache in your heart. Are you plagued by torments that twist you? Does it terrify you to look directly into the darkness of your own soul; to look into the face of what constantly trips you up?
 - ➔ Have you been told that it shouldn't be hard at all to have a relationship with God, but it is hard for you? It's a lie from Satan that makes you think that everyone else seems to succeed at being a Christian, except for you.
 - ➔ Are you too disabled by your past to hope in Christ the way you want to? Too crippled by your fears of being hurt – again – to love even Jesus freely? Are you ashamed that what should be beautiful and easy is hard for you because your own disabled heart is holding you back? Then come. This bread baked and given from the heat of the cross is specifically for those who are disabled. This wine is pressed and fermented at the point of metal spikes explicitly for those who are too bent over to straighten up. This – Jesus' own true body and blood – is only served to those who are already bowed down.
- ✘ Are you lame? Does your own stunted sinful nature hold you back? Do you find yourself not doing what you want to do but instead doing what you hate? (Rom 7:15). Do you see the ancient story of original sin actually playing itself out in your behavior while you watch? Are you ashamed that the only way you are going to get to heaven is if Jesus picks you up like a broken lamb and carries you home on His shoulders?
 - ➔ Jesus is not ashamed to carry you. Jesus is honored to be used for a crutch. If it meant you would be kept warm in the robe of His righteousness He was content to be stripped in public and scourged to near death. He was not ashamed to be nailed down and lifted up and exposed to the wrath of God if it meant your sins would be covered. He was not ashamed to return from hell and the grave, calling to all who are lame, "Come to the feast." This meal is only for His little brothers and sisters who must be carried to their loving Father.
- ✘ And what about the blind? Do you confess that original sin has blinded you with sins of both presumption and despair? (cf SA III I 1).

→ Do you ask yourself why it's taken so long to see the truth; so long to realize that you need Jesus to take you by the hand and lead you like a shepherd leading a baby lamb? Are you unable to fully realize that this bread and wine are actually the flesh and blood of Jesus from the cross, there in your hand; here upon your tongue? Can you be content with the mystery, knowing that it is still God's most beautiful truth? Jesus has prepared it and promised it! So, come. And you will be carried along by faith through the darkness by God Himself, body and blood, given and shed for you!

✘ Jesus invites to this, His feast, only those who can't pay Him back – the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, to the feast of His own body and blood, given and shed for those who can't pay Him back.

→ And just as He said of Himself – not you – in verse 14, the risen Christ, the five-wounded Victim, “will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous”; when He sees you and embraces you; made alive from the dead in your baptism; rich and glorious; strong and sound; and wide-eyed for the feast that goes on forever – starting right now! Amen.