

THE WEDDING FEAST

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Tuesday, August 27, 2019

Scripture: [Luke 14:1, 7–14](#)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

Any good teacher knows: you always have a lesson plan... but sometimes the class will show you what the lesson plan is supposed to be. So it is today for Jesus, who arrives at a sabbath feast as a guest... and along the way finds himself teaching about how to be a guest, and a host.

He tells the gathered crowd a parable about a wedding feast: to hear it quite right, it might help to know something about the wedding practices of the time and culture. For the meal, people recline and sit in a kind of a half circle: the bride and groom are at the top and center... and then honored guests sit at the their right and left, and then folks who might have a slightly lower station in the family or community, and on down through the guests... The trick is, if someone arrives who has a higher station than you... well, then, you're supposed to give up your place and move yourself on down the line.

How we are to place ourselves in these sorts of hierarchies, and how we are to participate (or not) in them is what Jesus has to talk about today.

SERMON

At this point in my life, I have officiated over 25 weddings. I think I have stayed for the party maybe 3 times. It's not really my scene. I get that this is weird: there are tons of people who are more than happy to skip the ceremony and get to the dinner, the dancing... all that. That makes sense, with weddings averaging \$33 thousand dollars... and trust me, that's not the fee from the church sanctuary... people want to get to the main event. Maybe because I spend time with these couples, I always wish they could skip some of the stress, the debt, the anxiety of all of that. Give me a chapel wedding any day.

Partly, I feel like the ceremony should be for the wider community... it is the process through which we recognize the newly married as one, and bless their new life in the world.

The dinner? That's always felt more personal... and frankly, I don't enjoy the look on the face of the poor distant relative who finds out they're seated next to the pastor and feel like they either have to watch their language for the rest of the evening, or like they have to unpack in glorious detail why they don't go to church anymore. The people in the room that I have spent the most time with are the bride and the groom, and well, they're busy.

These are good things to think about: Jesus loves a wedding. Jesus's ministry starts with a wedding feast in Cana... he provides wine when there is none, which I image put him in high demand for lots of weddings. Weddings are a favorite metaphor for him... he talks about the coming reign of God as the marriage of all that is: the meeting of a two as one. And here, though the meal he's attending at the house of a Pharisee is not a wedding, he adds the special significance and communal context of a wedding to illustrate his point about where those who want to follow him should look to place themselves in life.

Jesus is naming a thing that we all struggle with from an early age... where do I fit in the structures and societies in which I belong? Where do I think I fit? Where do others?

If we want to know how early these questions, and a lot of attendant anxiety, get to us: you need look no further than the busloads of kids who are headed back to school already, or will in the next few days. You may have forgotten it, maybe blacked it out... but they will be figuring out who the line leader is, or who they "should" sit next to in lunch, or what parties they "should" go to... if they are accepted to the "right" classes... so many ways that we are measured as a society and ranked.

I hear tell that goes on... what college you go to, what job you have, what church you go to, maybe?

I think it's easy for us to misread the first bit of Jesus's teaching today... the reminder not to sit too high up in the pecking order, lest you get knocked down and embarrassed. You spend too much time in our world and you can begin to hear this as a reminder to "know your place." But I really don't think that's it... I think maybe you start on the idea of "knowing your worth" (valuing yourself) but leaving room for others to shine as well. Above all, I think it stands as a warning that rules that they all have known are shifting in the ministry of Jesus and the breaking out of God's realm. Hierarchies will be disrupted, flipped, made new... and I'm going to say made "flatter".

This isn't hard to imagine, because it's already happening in this story. Remember, this is a poor man from Nazareth, with a bunch of fishermen that he collected on the side of the road, sitting in the home of one of the religious authorities of their time. This isn't supposed to happen!

It's hard not to think of our societal discussion across differences of economic status, race, gender, and sexuality in these days in the simple word, privilege. There has been an awful lot of fighting about something that does seem pretty clear: many of us have factors in our lives which have elevated our chances, our wealth, our comfort, our safety above others... through no action, nor often through any fault of our own.

For some, I think the discovery of privilege as a concept is destabilizing: the place you knew you fit is not what it was. But in the invitation of Jesus's parable today, the challenge to those who have received "places of honor" then, is to make sure that there are places for others. That there are seats at the table... and... to make sure that all are honored. The rules of feasts must change. On his last night on earth, Jesus will lay out the new seating arrangement... all are to be welcomed, all honored as guests of the most High God.

Jesus also points us to a reality: when we here inside the hall invite each other to each other's feasts we create an unchanging world of self-congratulation. To transform the world, we will have to invite the uninvited, we will have to make the feast a celebration of our differences not validation of our sameness. We will have to give ourselves away, with no hope of return, to set this table. We will have to disarm and set down all the weapons of our own privileges.

Yesterday in Odessa, Texas, in yet another multiple victim shooting, we were reminded that even safety from violence is a privilege that is distributed unevenly. We have been reminded through our asylum seeking families here that security, shelter, and food are not equally distributed around our world.

The challenge to us is then to make room, to honor, to welcome to table all equally, grounded in the truth that that is the table that has been set for us by Jesus. Because the world will find a way to measure you, unless you can ground yourself in the immeasurable love of God.

We come to this table regularly, and I hope you hear me say every time... all you have to be to be fed here is hungry. The feast is prepared for all equally, and all may equally draw near to the guest of honor... all of us participate of the wedding feast of body and spirit which is new life in Jesus Christ as honored guests. In all we do, may we gather others into to celebrate the marriage of all life and spirit in God's love and peace. Amen.