

I am a person of considerable privilege. I'm a white, male, (cis-gendered), able-bodied, working married father of two. I express my faith without fear, and worship in places that are open and public. (our doors are locked for "sensible" reasons...) My refrigerator is full of food and my garage is full of toys. My walls are covered with photographs of people I love and places I've been. I've never been in jail, though I have spent time in the back seat of a police car. I don't fear authority figures, I am free to travel, I am not usually on the lookout for angry mobs of hostile people because I'm not the kind of person who typically attracts angry mobs of hostile people. I attract mostly friendly gestures...like dinner invitations.

Reading the bible from my position of privilege is a complicated process. Never mind the differences in cultural understanding between 2019 and the ancient near East, it doesn't take much reading to discover - especially in the words and actions that surround Jesus - a peculiar attitude towards my kind of privilege. Religious leadership is regularly chastised. Jesus compassion is aimed at those who have nothing - the hungry are fed, the blind receive sight and the poor are given good news. Someone as comfortable as me hardly gets a second glance...until today.

Here in Luke's gospel is a moment out of the ordinary. Jesus invited to a party, as one honoured guest among many. He has, in the midst of this Sabbath celebration, met and mended a man with dropsy. He has challenged the "in" crowd to consider what the Sabbath is for;

"if one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?" (Luke 14:5). The stunned silence that meets Jesus question sets the tone for what is to come.

The dinner party - at the home of the leader of the Pharisees - is chaotic. People scramble to be noticed, competing for the host's attention and the honour of the moment. The host preens and postures, soaking up the adulation (that is due.)

These are privileged people seeking greater privilege, and Jesus 'parable' is savage. "Do not sit in the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited..."

You, scrambling for status - fighting over the best seats - where's your humility? Where are your manners? You're acting like you've got no relations.

And just when we think we know the point Jesus is going to make, he turns on the host - the most privileged person in the room, and lets him have it.

I don't know why it took me so long to notice the words "He said also to the one who had invited HIM....". That brief statement stops me in my tracks. Jesus dismisses the premise of this party altogether and calls into question the motivation of EVERYBODY IN THE ROOM! (Well, maybe not everybody...)

The immediate audience is a privileged audience; the guests have a certain social status; and the host is someone whose invitation was coveted.

These are the folks who have the most to offer to the ones whom Jesus calls the 'least of these' and these parallel parables are an indictment of the system of privilege that exists in Jesus day. From where I sit, they are no less challenging to us.

Let's think about this in terms of recent discussions (in the church and elsewhere) about inclusion. Who's in? Who's welcome? Who gets invited to the 'party' And most importantly; who gets to make those decisions? Jesus parable makes it simple. We do. The privileged, the insiders, people like you and me. The discussion we have about inclusion take place among those who are included by default. We talk about folks before we talk with them (or to them).

Those in control of everything from service clubs to the political process have an enormous burden of responsibility and Jesus - recognizing that - wants to make sure that it happens according to the rules of justice, mercy and love that define God's promised

reign. Jesus rant over lunch offers the following advice; don't forget to exercise humility. Don't act as though the world (and everyone in it) ought to be amazed by your 'status' and grateful for your attention. Just Do Good. Just Behave with Dignity (and honour the dignity of your fellow traveler). [Don't be a Jerk...was briefly the working title for this sermon]

When push comes to shove, the privileged in Jesus community will push back. When their privilege is threatened, they take the path of least resistance, and declare Jesus a dangerous offender. Crucifixion ought to settle the question of 'who's in charge here', but of course, the outcome was much different that.

When God exercises the privilege that comes from - well, from being God - suddenly life is death and death brings new life, and the last are first and the whole enterprise is gloriously upended. When God throws a party, it is marked by reckless generosity. And the guest list is vast and various; and the places of honour are everywhere.

So maybe it is an image of the kingdom, and perhaps God has invited us all to the party together. So to the guests, one message; don't crowd the best seats; bear patiently with one another; recognize and rejoice in this diverse gathering of equally valued guests. Let the host be the host. Because our host has no time for our narrow understanding of privilege. Our host doesn't need approval or assurance from us. Our host is the epitome of hospitality - and the party has only just begun.