

Guest & Host
Luke 14:1, 7-14
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In the Greco-Roman world the principal meal of the day was the evening supper, a relaxed occasion marked by extended conversation, and the reinforcement of social status. Hosts accrued honour for the number of people, the quality of people, the type of food and entertainment. Seating arrangements had significant consequences. Closer to the host, better food would be served. Closer to the host meant closer to the local leaders - getting in on decisions being made or business contracts given. There was significant jockeying to host the right people, and to get the best spot. We understand that even today, better food and business connections at the Cypress or Rotary Club than Tim Horton's.

Our scripture reading today opens with Jesus invited to a dinner party. "On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely." I almost wonder if Jesus is part of the entertainment - if so, they aren't disappointed. He upends so many assumptions, and challenges the prevailing use of banquets to flaunt and elevate one's status in the community. The entire chapter is a series of awkward parables and actions aimed at comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.

And in the process Jesus, who came as guest, also becomes host. Inviting those caught in the patterns of the world to take up the patterns of the Kingdom of God. To accept the invitation not simply to a supper, but to the banquet of the resurrection. Rather than reinforcing the status quo of the hospitality hierarchy, Jesus paints a picture where hosts and guests are freed from the social norms. Guests - don't jockey for honour. Hosts - include those who get left out.

I had the opportunity to host a dinner party this week, or rather to attend one as a guest. I'd suggested the idea to one person who brainstormed with me until we had a plan - a date, a guestlist, a menu, and a location - her place.

As the day drew nearer we sorted out the usual host details: invites, drinks, set up, activities, reminders and so on. As guests arrived, greetings from the host began. But then a curious blurring began to occur, storytellers shared experiences, the curious asked great questions with attentive listening. One family shared their cool hammock chair with anyone who wanted to try it out. The food was laid out - potluck to compliment the BBQ, an family originally from around the world shared a salad and custard from their culture, and children pitched in with serving drinks and clean up, and I realized we had all become hosts and guests taking a part in building generous community.

A simple, but lovely, even holy endeavor.

Jesus so often reflects on table manners that Strong's Greek lexicon notes that the main meal, *deipnon* (dape - non), "moves from everyday custom to redemptive symbol. It exposes pride, celebrates intimacy with Jesus, shapes ecclesial practice, and heralds the ultimate union of Christ and His church." (Strong's Greek: 1173)

Shapes ecclesial practice? That's fancy words for how the church works. When Jesus tells guests not to grab the best seats, He isn't just giving table etiquette. He's tearing down the whole social ladder. And

when He tells hosts to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind—the ones who *cannot* repay—you can hear the gasp around the table. Because He's not just talking about dinner. He's talking about the church, and it's a lesson we have to revisit again and again and again.

For example, let's take a trip back 500 years. The western church was embedded in structures of hierarchy. Position in that church came with perks—power, prosperity, and control. Communion was withheld from everyday people and taken only by priests. The scriptures were read in a language no one spoke. But Jesus had said: don't grab the seat of honor. Don't reserve the invitation for those who benefit you. Don't build a church around hierarchy and status.

The Protestant Reformers heard that. They placed the scriptures in the language of the people. They stripped the table of its gold and brought it back to the people. They said this meal is for all who follow Jesus—not just the clergy, not just the influential, not just the insiders. Because that's how Jesus hosts. And that's how the church should too.

And if that's how Jesus has us eat, then that's how we ought to govern and lead too. No more bishops, archdeacons and popes. The church is a circle of elders; teaching elders to preach, ruling elders on session. And the elders are chosen not for their social status, financial power or political influence, but for their modelling of being a Jesus shaped guest and host.

At its best, our church has tried to inherit that wisdom. Our elder districts, our pastoral care, our ministries—these are not platforms for prestige, but places of service. When elders serve, they are hosting the Jesus-community—not to gain honor, but to make space. Not to secure power, but to extend hospitality.

And it's why St. John's has a volunteer coordinator, so that everyone is invited into building that generous community. Why the service of coffee hosts trains us in the ways of service and inclusion. It's the reason we still invite people into membership in the church. Invitation to take your place as both guest and host. Some of us may serve as elders formally. But *all* of us are being formed into hosts of Jesus' table. And all of us are guests—welcomed not by our merit, but by His grace.

“On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.” As Jesus was watched, so are we. People are still watching how the church hosts. Whether the table is still open. Whether we invite only the likeminded and the socially desirable—or whether we go out and befriend the ones Jesus named: the left out, the unseen, the ones with no ability to repay.

Let us invite Jesus into our lives to repair our hearts and minds, cultivate generous community, and live expectantly for the resurrection wedding feast to come. May it be so in our lives and in our life together. Amen.