

“COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY”

Luke 14:1-24

Key Verse: 14:17

“At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’”

In the last passage, Jesus said, **“People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God”** (13:29). Jesus declared the kingdom of God open to the Gentiles. In today’s passage Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God is open to the marginalized, as well as the Gentiles. This was a very challenging teaching for the Jewish religious leaders. They had an elitist mentality that easily disregarded and excluded the weak, the poor, the crippled, and public sinners. This elitist mentality has been a cause of injustice and alienation then and now. The phrase “white privilege” is one way it is manifest. But this elitism does not develop just on the basis of race. It also develops on the basis of wealth, social status, and education. When we receive diplomas at graduation, we are told that we have received rights and privileges based on our education. To earn and enjoy privileges is wonderful. But there is a danger that we can develop an elitist mentality based on our privileges, look down on the weak and less fortunate, and say and do things that damage them. How can we bear the privileges we have received? Today Jesus helps the religious leaders positively by showing them God’s heart of compassion for the weak and needy. When we share God’s heart, we can see others with love and understanding, and care for them, using our privileges to serve. Let’s learn God’s heart in today’s passage.

First, Jesus reveals God’s heart in action (1-14). One Sabbath, Jesus was invited to the house of a prominent Pharisee for dinner (1). This man seems to be a leader among the Pharisees, and his house was filled with them, as well as experts in the law. It must have been a big house, and beautiful. It seems that they invited Jesus in order to trap him. They were all watching him closely, hoping to catch him in a mistake. They seated a man right in front of Jesus who was suffering from abnormal swelling in his body (2). Luke uses the word *hydropikos* to describe his condition. It is a Greek medical term which appears only here in the Bible. It meant that excess fluid had filled the tissues of the body, caused perhaps by cancer, or possibly by liver or kidney problems. This man had suffered a great deal due to this problem. Since some body parts were abnormally large, he looked hideous. People naturally despised him. Such a man

“COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY”

could have no hope of marriage or of living a normal life. The religious elite knew that Jesus would try to heal him, out of his great compassion, even on the Sabbath. They thought they could trap Jesus and charge him with breaking the law. They were really evil. They ignored all the good things Jesus had done. They cared nothing for a suffering person, and only made use of him for their plot.

Most people, when attacked by those with such an evil motive, will become very upset. But Jesus was not. Rather, Jesus found this as an opportunity to teach them. Jesus took the initiative and asked them, **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”** (3) Jesus spoke openly and clearly about the issue. But they remained silent. They knew Jesus was right, and they could make no argument against him. But they were not going to listen to reason. They had hardened their hearts to Jesus. They wanted to kill him. Jesus knew his life would be in danger. But this did not matter. Jesus, the good shepherd, was ready to lay down his life for this one person. Immediately, Jesus took hold of the man, healed him and sent him on his way (4). Usually Jesus spoke words of healing. But here Jesus took hold of the man with his hands. They were the hands of the Creator God with tremendous power. Yet they were gentle, caring hands, which communicated warmth and affection. Divine power surged through the man’s body. At once he was healed. His body was fully restored. His lifelong problem had been solved. He could have true rest on this Sabbath day for the first time.

Then Jesus asked the religious leaders, **“If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?”** (5) Last week in China, a three-year old boy fell down a 300 foot well. Twelve firefighters using every means available made every effort until they safely pulled him out after two hours. If an ox or a pet dog was trapped, its owner would immediately come to its rescue. It is because they love and value their children and animals. To Jesus, the man who needed healing was like his son who was in great danger. So Jesus loved him and healed him immediately, on the Sabbath. On hearing Jesus’ words, the religious leaders’ consciences were stricken. So they had nothing to say.

The point of Jesus’ teaching is that they should practice the law with a shepherd’s heart, not legalistic self-righteousness. The same is true for us. God wants us to share his heart, burning with love for the lost. There are so many

“COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY”

people who are crying in their souls because they need a shepherd, especially on our campuses. They have fallen into pits of anxiety, fear, fatalism, sorrow, and despair, and are desperate. They are dying in their sins under Satan’s torment. They need rescue right away. They need shepherds. We should be their shepherds. But if we have no shepherd’s heart, we just ignore them. We need a shepherd’s heart for them. Then we can help pull them out of the pit. Let’s pray to have God’s shepherd’s heart as we begin a new fall semester.

The religious leaders heard Jesus’ teaching and were embarrassed for a moment. But soon, what had come in one ear went right out the other. They were so proud; they had no room for Jesus’ words in their hearts. Their whole attention turned to their dinner party—what they would eat and where they would sit. Their great concern was where they would sit. To them, it was a matter of vital importance. They thought that the more honorable their position, the more power and influence they could exert. They did not know the true meaning of honor. To any human being, a sense of honor is important, for it is part of God’s image in us. Romans 2:7 says, **“To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.”** The U.S. Military Academy’s motto is: “Duty, Honor, Country.” Among those three words, “honor” is the foundation. “Honor” implies courage, sacrifice, respect, truthfulness, purity and integrity and more. A courageous person is honorable; a cowardly person is shameful. A sacrificial person is honorable; a selfish person is shameful. This honor does not come from a position, title or social status. It comes from one’s inner character. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul urged believers to honor Timothy and Epaphroditus and people like them. It is because they had genuine concern for the well-being of the believers. They worked hard and sacrificially for the sake of Christ, to the point of death (Php 2:19-30). Such people do not concern themselves with seats of honor; they just want to please God and serve others without seeking self-glory.

The religious leaders had carefully watched Jesus to catch a mistake. But Jesus also observed them very carefully. When he noticed how sensitive they were about the places of honor, he told them a parable to help them understand the meaning of true honor (7). **“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place”** (8-9). The humiliated one would lose their

“COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY”

appetite, hang their head in shame, and look for the nearest exit. It would have been better not to go to the wedding feast. It seems that Jesus well understood the agony of the religious leaders. Jesus went on to tell them the way to be honored: **“But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests”** (10). The honored one would have a good appetite, be full of joy, and thoroughly enjoy the banquet.

Jesus gave them a good strategy. But knowing the strategy was not enough; there was an underlying principle they needed to practice. Jesus said in verse 11, **“For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”** Here we learn that genuine honor comes from God to those who are humble. The Bible says, **“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble”** (Pr 3:34; Ja 4:6; 1Pe 5:5). Though we know this, it is hard to practice. We human beings are naturally proud. We are ready to exalt ourselves at any opportunity. In order to humble ourselves, we need to make every effort to deny ourselves. Most of all, we need to learn Christ’s humbleness. Paul encouraged us to have Christ’s mindset, who humbled himself to be a man, became a servant, and was obedient to God even to death (Php 2:5-8). Then God exalted him to the highest place (Php 2:9-11). To obtain true honor, we need to be humble before God. Lord, help this proud sinner learn Jesus’ humility. Amen!

In verses 12-14 Jesus advised his host what kind of people to invite to his dinner party. Inviting people to a lunch or dinner is very good. Some people never invite others. The issue Jesus made is what kind of people to invite. Some people are willing to invite their friends, relatives and rich neighbors. In the back of their minds, they know they will be invited in return (12a). Such a group develops into a mutually beneficial party society. According to Jesus, they fully repay each other and there is no reward from God (12b). They are not blessed people. Jesus really wanted them to be blessed people. So he said, **“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”** (13-14). Jesus said to invite the marginalized. They are the wounded, the rejected, the helpless. They are regarded as useless, and are so easily overlooked. There are many such people around us. Outwardly they seem to be okay. But when we have deep

“COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY”

conversations, we can learn how much they are suffering. Jesus wants us to be aware of the agonies of needy people around us and to serve them. To do this requires a shepherd's heart, willingness to sacrifice, and especially great humility. Furthermore, it requires resurrection faith which seeks God's reward. God is the God who rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb 11:6). Jesus promised that anyone who gives a cup of water in his name will certainly not lose their reward (Mk 9:41). When we serve needy people, we will be blessed and honored by God. Jesus taught this spiritual truth to the religious leaders. Though they tried to destroy Jesus, Jesus positively cared for them and taught the best truth out of a shepherd's heart.

Second, Jesus reveals God's shepherd's heart through a parable (15-24).

One of those at the table was inspired by Jesus' words **“at the resurrection of the righteous.”** So he blurted out, **“Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God”** (15). He longed to participate in the heavenly feast, and assumed he would be there. But would he really? Jesus told a parable to explain who will enjoy God's banquet and to reveal God's heart's desire. A certain man was preparing a great banquet. He invited many guests. This man had great wealth and was a master of many servants. He must have ordered the most delicious kinds of food, including prime rib, lobster, shepherd's pie, deep dish pizza, tacos, burritos, yookgaejang, Texas style barbeque pork, many kinds of chips and exotic dips, and more than 50 kinds of ice cream. He ordered his orchestra, singers and dancers to master the most exquisite kinds of music. He trained his servants to carry out their duties with great respect for the guests. This came from a deep desire to love and honor his people. He sent invitations well in advance, and everyone said, **“Yes, I am coming! It is an honor, sir!”** Indeed, it was a great honor.

According to Jewish custom, such banquet invitations were sent in advance without specifying the day. When everything was ready, the host would send an announcement. At last the banquet was fully prepared and the master sent his servant to say, **“Come, for everything is now ready”** (17). The master waited eagerly and expectantly for the guests to arrive. But no one was coming. Then, his servant returned by himself and reported the responses of the guests. The first said, **“I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me”** (18). Another said, **“I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me”** (19). Still another said, **“I just got married, so I can't come”** (20). Their excuses seemed to be

“COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY”

reasonable. But in fact, they were rejecting the owner’s invitation, ignoring the love and honor he had extended. Why did they refuse to come? They did not value the owner’s invitation enough to come. Other things seemed more important.

When the owner heard their excuses, he became angry. It seemed that he had no choice but to cancel the banquet. But he did not. Instead, he ordered his servant, **“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame”** (21). These people never expected to be invited to the banquet. When the invitation came, they were so surprised and accepted it immediately with great joy. Yet there was still room, and the servant reported this to the master (22). Then the master told his servant, **“Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full”** (23). The master wanted to fill his house with all kinds of people so they could enjoy his banquet. Jesus concluded, **“I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet”** (24).

In this parable the master represents God; those who are invited are the people of Israel; the poor, crippled, blind and lame stand for the marginalized—the outcast and public sinners; and those along the roads and country lanes are the Gentiles. The servant refers to Jesus in the role of God’s servant, as well as other servants, like Paul, who invited the Gentiles to the kingdom of God. God provided the heavenly banquet of salvation. God prepared step by step in thorough detail, looking forward to the time of celebrating with his people. Then he invited his chosen people Israel. God’s plan was to bless the whole world by spreading the knowledge of salvation through them. Though this was only by God’s grace, they became proud and self-righteous. Then when Jesus came to announce the coming of the kingdom, they refused it. God’s salvation plan seemed to fail. But God never fails. God executed “Plan B.” God’s blessing overflowed to the Gentiles (Ro 11:11). The marginalized and the Gentiles did not deserve to be invited to the kingdom, but they were. It was by the grace of God.

We are all Gentiles. We were dead in our transgressions and sins. We gratified the cravings of our flesh and followed its desires and thoughts. We were, by nature, deserving of wrath. We were without hope and without God in the world (Eph 2:1-3,12). But while we were in this condition, God sent Jesus to us to invite us to his kingdom. Jesus announced, **“The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”** (Mk

“COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY”

1:15) Jesus fulfilled God’s salvation work through his death and resurrection. After that, repentance for the forgiveness of sins was proclaimed to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. This invitation still stands. Now is the day of salvation (2Co 6:2). Whoever responds to God’s invitation can enter his kingdom. All we have to do is accept the invitation by faith. The problem is that many Gentiles feel undeserving to be invited because they committed many sins. They know they are undisciplined and unruly and too dirty to enter the kingdom. They think that if they enter the kingdom of God, it will be contaminated. So they need to be “compelled” to come in. Here “compel” does not mean to violate others’ personhood. It means to know God’s great love, and the tremendous grace he is giving, and to persuade reluctant sinners to accept it. It means to plead with them earnestly, gently, and winsomely until they open their eyes and willingly accept it. When St. Paul knew God’s heart, he said, **“For Christ’s love compels us...”** (2Co 5:14).

When all kinds of marginalized, wounded and broken people, and unclean and terrible sinners are coming into the kingdom, it seems that they will ruin it. The kingdom of God will seem more like a garbage dump than a beautiful kingdom. But that will not happen. It is because the power of the gospel transforms people. When we accept the gospel by faith, God justifies us by the blood of Jesus; he sanctifies us by the work of the Holy Spirit; and finally, when Jesus comes again, he glorifies us by transforming our lowly bodies into glorious bodies like his (Php 3:21). Praise God who invites us to the heavenly banquet (Rev 19:9). None of us deserve this invitation. It has come to us from the riches of God’s love and by his grace alone. All we need to do is accept it and rejoice. Let’s accept this gracious invitation. Let’s learn God’s heart and invite those who need Jesus persuasively and persistently.