

## Awkward Hospitality with Jesus (Luke 14:1-14)

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What things do people say about Jesus? When we look at the Bible, and look at the people who were near Jesus, who had actual contact with him: What things do they say about Jesus?

He's "The Christ, the Son of the Living God". He's "my Lord and my God". He's "rabbi" or teacher.

He's a glutton and a drunkard.

Yes, you heard that right. Jesus has a reputation in Scripture as a glutton and a drunkard. (Matthew 11:18-19; Luke 7:33-35)

At first this sounds outlandish to our concepts of Jesus. It sounds like a bold lie.

But when we think of where Jesus spent much of His time, it was not a difficult accusation to make. Jesus was constantly around the table with other people. He was eating. He was in the company of others. He was turning water into wine. So much of the significant teaching we read from Jesus takes place around a meal. In doing all these things Jesus sets an example for us to follow.

Troy spoke last week on the importance of spiritual disciplines, why we take the time to use habits to connect to God. One of those spiritual habits is the habit of eating together. We see Jesus doing this frequently in the Gospel books of the Bible, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He always seems to be invited to someone's house for a meal, or he is inviting himself over to someone's house for a meal. (Mom rightly said that it was bad manners to invite yourself over to someone else's house, but here's Jesus doing just that.)

As we see Jesus interact with people at meals, we learn much of how we are supposed to eat together and how we are to interact with people. We learn much of the ministry of simply being fully human with the people around us. So we are going to look at a meal that Jesus has with others and see how this guides us away from a lifestyle of isolation and separation, to one that truly reflects who God is and the life God is calling us to live.

*Luke 14:1-6 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. <sup>2</sup> There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. <sup>3</sup> Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" <sup>4</sup> But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.*

*<sup>5</sup> Then he asked them, "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?" <sup>6</sup> And they had nothing to say.*

At this meal, Jesus truly sees people. He seems to be at the meal with people far more influential and prominent than the man suffering from abnormal swelling in his body. But Jesus truly sees this man. He

does not just notice him and then carry on with the influential people. Jesus truly sees. Jesus truly engages with this man.

Jesus has this incredible ability to see people. In the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), short Zacchaeus climbs the tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus, but it is Jesus that truly sees Zacchaeus, calls him by name and invites himself over to Zacchaeus' house (rude!). As Jesus is surrounded by people on his way to heal someone's daughter, being nearly crushed on every side, Jesus notices that someone has touched him (Luke 8:40-48). Jesus asks "who touched me?" and the disciples respond "I don't know. Everyone???" The person who touched Jesus was just trying to touch him so she could be healed, and Jesus notices this contact. Jesus has this ability to truly see people, and truly see the ones that are needing a connection with him.

Too often we don't see like Jesus. Sure, we see people, but we see them as obstacles. "Great, I have to walk by this homeless person who is going to bother me for change on my way to the store." "This person is sitting in the seat I like best – better tell 'em to move!"

Those of us who take part in men's study on Thursday mornings at 7:15 read a story of a person being seen as an obstacle instead of being seen. It's from Mark Buchanan's book *Your Church is Too Safe*.

*A young lady from our church moved to another city to attend university. I knew of a very good church in that city . . . and I recommended she try it. Her first Sunday, she arrived early and took a seat near the front. A few minutes later, a couple walked in and stood over her. She looked up and asked if she was in their seat.*

*"Yes."*

*She got up and moved three rows back. The next person just told her straight up, "you're sitting in my seat." She moved again, this time to the other side of the sanctuary and further back. Shortly, another couple came, sat in the pew directly in front of her, and turned and glowered at her.*

*"Am I in your seat?"*

*"Yes you are. That has been our seat for forty years."*

*She got up, sat in the balcony, and thereafter never returned. (p. 152, 153)*

What a tragic story. This university student was seen as an obstacle, but never truly seen. We can think, "Well I'm glad our church isn't like that." But we should not rush too hard to congratulate ourselves either.

Just because we're not hostile to people does not mean we truly see them, either. Three years ago I got a phone call in my office from someone who had attended our church the week before. They were someone who was hurt by something that occurred during their visit. They were standing at the back of the church where we have sermon notes from previous weeks and information on baptism and who we are as a church. While they are browsing, someone steps in front of them, grab a sermon and walked away.

As I listened to this person relay this story I was thinking, "What's the big deal? Someone was in a hurry and grabbed something. They didn't push you out of the way. They did not speak to you rudely. Why is this such a big deal?!"

The person asked me in tears, “Do you think Jesus is at your church?” I did not know what to do or say because this obviously seemed like a person with issues and onion paper thin skin. They were making all of these assumptions about our church based on someone stepping in front of them to grab a resource.

Much later it hit me: this moment would not have been such a big deal if she felt like someone actually saw her – truly saw her and acknowledged her – at our church that Sunday. I can guarantee you this happens a lot – not receiving tearful phone calls, but people attending without feeling like anyone noticed them at our church. Not because we’re bad or selfish or any of those things. But because of so much going on around us we fail to truly see people. We have ministries to run, friends to catch up with, things on our minds. If someone comes to our church will they truly be seen? Will people engage with them? Will they get a genuine sense of “I see you and I am glad you are here?”

People rarely attend church anymore. It is a huge personal statement and a big step when they do. When people come to our church, do they sense that they have been seen and truly welcomed?

Jesus sees. We can too.

Jesus honours those around him.

*Luke 14:7-11* <sup>7</sup> When Jesus noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: <sup>8</sup> “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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Jesus sees people making sure they pick the very best seats. This is not just for the sake of convenience. It’s not like arriving early at a concert and rushing to the front of the stage for the view you want. It’s sitting somewhere because you feel it properly relates to your status. It’s putting yourself in a position of honour, or behaving in a way that screams pay attention to me and notice how witty I am. Or smart. Or influential.

Jesus honours others first. He comes as a servant to all. He willingly submits himself to the cross. God honours us. Think about that for a moment!

In most of the circles we travel we don’t have much in the way of formality, so Jesus’ teaching here may come off as irrelevant. But there are all kinds of ways that we can elevate and honour people – show interest in them rather than trying to make ourselves seem compelling to them.

For the past five summers we have run a day camp at Lighthouse Gospel Church in Standoff. Being on a First Nations Community, we recognize we are fully in someone else’s home when we go there. We want to go with a high level of honour and respect. On the Monday of our day camp this past summer, not many children had shown up yet. So the pastor suggested I take my van, go into the town site, and just get kids to hop in the van and drive them to day camp.

This seemed like all levels of wrong. “Hi, kids. We’re two white male strangers. So just hop in my van here and we’ll take you to day camp. It will be fun!” This is everything you do not do working with children. So we made a significant compromise. We went into town, but instead of approaching children, we talked to adults and parents and notified them about the day camp.

I anticipated a bit of suspicion and hostility when we did this. We’re strangers. There are a whole lot of reasons to distrust white people in first nations communities. We’re approaching people we don’t know and may come off as annoying. (It’s bad enough when the telemarketer is on the other side of the phone let alone standing right in front of you.) We received absolutely no suspicion, no hostility, no annoyance. People were warm. People were welcoming. People were friendly. I’m not sure I have ever been to an unfamiliar place where I felt so welcomed.

Let’s flip this situation. Imagine two men who live in Standoff come to Lethbridge. Do you think they receive that same level of warmth and welcome and friendliness? First Nations people in our city can probably tell you story after story of being watched with suspicion and hostility, let alone treated with suspicion and hostility. I think the word rarely used of the First Nations experience in Lethbridge is “welcome”.

In Standoff we felt honoured – we felt respected, we felt welcomed, we felt like we mattered. Do I extend that sense of honour to people in the places that are my home turf, like my own neighbourhood or my church. Or do people come into my space feeling unwanted and despised?

Jesus sees people. Jesus honours people. Jesus invites people.

*Luke 14:12-14* <sup>12</sup> Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

For many of us, this feels like bad news coming from Jesus. We have a hard enough time making space to invite friends to our homes, let alone total strangers. Let alone total strangers with high needs! So maybe let’s back up a little. Like Dr. Leo Marvin, let’s take baby steps in the ways in which we extend invitation to people.

Remember than when Jesus says invite all these people – the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind – it’s not out of obligation. It’s not put on a banquet, host everyone, send everyone home, and then moan “Well I’m glad that’s over with”. Jesus is talking about true engagement. Truly seeing people. Truly honouring them. Truly extending friendship and sitting at the table as equals. Sitting at the table and acknowledging same-ness, not extending pity. Not the bare minimum of tolerating them and rejoicing when they leave.

So in what ways can we begin to live a life of invitation?

A good part of it – see yourself in this story. See yourself first of all as the poor, crippled, lame, blind being invited to a banquet that Jesus has set before you. You had nothing of true value to offer to God – not means of being impressive, no means of repayment, and Jesus welcomes you in. Gladly. Fully. Not

because he's God and he has to put up with you, but because he truly wants your presence. See yourself as you really are –desired and invited by Jesus – and recognize the incredible generosity of Jesus.

Begin inviting people in the spaces you already are. As you are able (because I know this is a massive stretch for some) talk to people who are not connected to anyone else.

Invite people that you are talking to into relationship with others. Usually we are stunted and awkward in our conversations with new people. “What’s your name? [insert awkward pause] Well, see you later!” That’s how awkward we are with people. We say hi and move on. At least we have seen the person, but let’s take the next step beyond that.

Instead we can meet someone on a Sunday morning and invite them into relationship with other people. Introduce someone you met to someone else you know. Be someone that helps people connect to one another. “Hey, [friend from church]. Have you met [person I just met]? They’re from northeastern Coaldale and like making Popsicle stick sculptures of European royalty of the 1700s.” It’s that simple.

Invite! Share events from our church that you think are compelling with friends on Facebook. Invite friends to things that you know are of interest to them. Invite someone to something you hate but that you know they would like – and attend with them!

Invite people to be part of your life. We see potential for friendship. But we don’t act on it. If you find yourself drawn to a person, and communicating with them well, that stuff could be God-ordained.

I know for the introverts in the room this morning, this whole sermon has probably felt like a horror show. We may as well have watched Stephen King’s *It* instead of hearing a sermon. But all of us are uniquely equipped to welcome others that few others are equipped to do.

Trust your instincts. Trust the Holy Spirit. For safety sake – we can be really naïve in dealing with some people. Talk to any of our police officers and corrections staff about sketchy situations people have gotten themselves or others into because they were being compassionate but extremely unwise. Trust the Holy Spirit and your instincts for the sake of those around us – if the Holy Spirit keeps bringing someone to mind they may truly need your presence in their lives right now. Be shrewd as snakes, harmless as doves.

Having meals with one another can be awkward. Inviting people to things can be awkward. Being the person to make the first step in any social situation will be awkward. But Jesus uses us as we truly see the people who are often ignored, honour the people that feel disconnected, invite others into abundant life shared with others and engaged in Christ.

What is the next step of invitation that Jesus is calling you to make to other people?

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