

Psalm 112
August 29, 2010

Luke 14:1,7-14
St. James U.C.C.

OPEN TABLE

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How do we live out the hospitality that God models? With no expectation of payback, God welcomes and feed all who humbly come to the banquet table seeking to satisfy our hungry hearts. Psalm 112 is a eulogy to the godly man Psalm 111 and 112 are so similar and were probably written by the same author. The Psalms tells us that a godly man brings blessing to his children and is blessed through them. That he will have no fear of bad news; as he has a deep trust in the Lord. That he is not worried or afraid and he is very generous and kind. The type of a person we all strive to be.

Luke's record of Jesus eating dinner at the Pharisee's home assumes knowledge of table fellowship that his community would have readily understood. Dinners were not simply meals but social events that bonded people of similar status together. The eating arrangement was crucial because people expected to eat with their social equals. Being seated next to a diner considered socially inferior disgraced the more prominent guest. Moreover, according to ancient records, people could find out who had been invited before they decided whether or not to attend. Sometimes if the "wrong" people would be there, many potential guests made excuses and declined the invitation. Others declined the invitation if they felt that they could not reciprocate the hospitality. When invitations were issued and accepted, guest knew that they were obligating themselves to host a dinner that would measure up to the standards of the one they had attended.

Jesus uses the occasion to describe the reign of God. God's reign is not about "measuring up" but about being invited by God. Jesus tells the host to invite persons of low social status, those who cannot reciprocate the invitation. He also admonishes the host not to invite those who could possibly return the favor. The reign of God is marked by true generosity, like the generosity God pours out on all.

What if I asked everyone to get up and move those on my right please move to my left? Those in the back move to the front. Would you be happy changing your seats? Probably not we all are accustomed to sit in our favorite place in the church. One of my favorite songs is “Part of the Family”. It begins “Come In, Come In and Sit Down” and it speaks to us of how we are all part of God’s family. We all are welcomed in His sanctuary. And here is God’s place that is a life to be shared in the bread and the wine.

I love the verse “Children and elders, middlers and teens, singles and doubles and in between, strong eighty-fivers and streetwise sixteen’s, greeters and shoppers, long-time and new nobody here has a claim on the pew, and whether we’re many or whether we’re few we are a part of the family. Nobody here has a claim on a pew. Doesn’t that seem the theme of today’s gospel reading? In our reading we see Jesus eating at the home of a prominent Pharisee and watching how the guests behave. Each seeks out the best place, the places of honor at the table where they can be noticed by the other guests and by their proximity to their host, be served first and receive the best portions that the table offers.

Humility is part to the theme of today’s reading. The humility to recognize that it is up to our host, that it is up to our God to seat us and to grant us honor or not, just as he chooses. The humility, the trust, to recognize that every seat at the table of God is a good seat, that allows us to receive the fullness of God’s blessing, the fullness of what God promises to all who respond to his invitation to come to him.

Alcoholics Anonymous defines humility this way, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.” This sermon today is not simply about humility, but it is about thinking of ourselves less and others more. Who are we thinking of when we come to this house of God? Who are we inviting to come with us? Are we more concerned about what we may or may not receive from God this morning than we are about the fate of the rest of the family of God? When our favorite pew is occupied do we resent it when a stranger is sitting there or do we welcome the stranger?

Our lesson tells us that we are to do things for those who can do nothing for us in return. Our love is to be poured out to the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Barbara Brown Taylor talks of this very eloquently in her book “Bread of Angeles”. “It is what you do when you think no one is looking, with someone who does not count, for no reward, that ushers you into the presence of God. If you want to enter this kingdom of God there is a way; go find a nobody to put your arms around and say hello to God”. Jesus gives us a message about openness, about trust, about reaching out beyond our natural reach to embrace others, to embrace life, to embrace God.

I pray that God meets your every need this morning. I’m sure that most of you are praying for the needs of those seated next to you, those that you have known for a long time and those whom you have know for a short time.

Lets also go further and pray for those outside this place of worship that they may enter and we will welcome them with the same grace, the same love the same hope that we receive. Are we an inviting people, do we speak inviting words, do we have an inviting attitude. Do we reach out to people who are not like us, those who have nothing to offer to us in return? God invited us here and we need to invite those who come through the doors.

I know all of us are willing give up our seats today to someone who is a part of the family of God. Someone like us who is in need of rest and health. Someone who needs to let go of the burdens that are crushing and the yoke that is hard and to take upon themselves the yoke of Christ.

In God’s eyes, we are all equally needy. None of us will ever be “good enough” to expect that the presence of God belongs to us. I ask you today not to think less of yourselves, you are, after all, part of the family of God and Christ has given his life for each one of us.

In the letter to the Hebrews we read this advice: “Be sure to welcome strangers into your home. By doing this, some people have welcomed angels as guests, without even knowing it.”

PRAYER

Help us this morning to understand that we are part of your family and that each one of us is special to you.

Amen