

**A Committed Community
by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday February 19, 2023**

Luke 14:12-35

This morning I hope to spend a few minutes on the dinner parties, but more time on the troubling passage about discipleship.

First in Verse 12 we have Jesus telling us who we should have to dinner – and its people who won't be able to pay us back, who we aren't going to receive any benefit from. This is another example of the upside values of the kingdom of God.

In the culture of Jesus' day everything was about honor and shame. Every interaction was an opportunity to gain or lose honor. If you had a prominent person to dinner, you would gain honor.

Honor was very important. When you gained honor for yourself you also gained it for your household. Everyone in your household was part of bringing honor or shame to you and your name.

Dinners, hosting people for meals, would potentially bring you status and honor, if the right people attended. We have some of that in our culture, but it was much, much more important in Jesus' day.

Inviting people to a meal for what it will benefit you is the opposite of Jesus' teaching. In the kingdom of God, Jesus taught, we value service.

So, when you're having a meal, or a party, the guest list, according to Jesus shouldn't be set by who will make you a star, but rather who you can serve and lift up.

It doesn't mean you can't have friends to dinner and enjoy them, and care for them, and serve them. It doesn't mean that we don't invite family and care for them. It doesn't mean that we don't have wealthy people to dinner or that we don't go to dinner with those who invite us. It does mean that we don't live our lives with the focus on what we can get from people, but rather what we can give.

The second part of the passage, the dinner that the Master throws, speaks to the same points as the narrow door that's not so narrow.

God is throwing the party of the ages, and the banquet is ready, and the invitations are going out. Jesus is inviting the people of Israel, God's chosen people to the banquet, and some are refusing to come. Jesus sends his servant far and wide to invite any and all, all of us are invited. The Master's great desire is that the banquet be full. This is NOT an exclusive party... if you're not in, it's because you excluded yourself.

And then Jesus begins to speak to the large crowd about discipleship and counting the cost of following Jesus.

Luke tells us that a large crowd was following Jesus listening to his teachings. This is not a group of committed followers; this is the crowd who have all kinds of plans for Jesus. This is the crowd who will hail Jesus as the Messiah and expect that he will lead them against Rome, and later will call for his crucifixion.

Jesus turns to the crowds and says:

Vs 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

This does not sound like the teaching of Jesus. Hopefully no one believes that Jesus really wants us to "hate" anyone, let alone our family and our children.

This kind of speech and the point of this is similar to a teaching of Jesus that Matthew records:

*"No one can serve **two masters**, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."*

This discipleship passage is about who we are going to be devoted to, who is going to be first in our lives. It is not literally about who we will love and who we will hate, but it is about who will have the first place in our lives.

Jesus tells us clearly that if we want to be his disciples, he has to have the first place. Jesus is looking for disciples, apprentices who will learn his ways. This is

not something that we fall into, but it is intentional, setting our feet in Jesus' path. It is serious and it is difficult.

I was listening to a sermon on this passage this week and the preacher said that he thinks there are people who expect Jesus to be like a politician. Jesus is laying out his plan for how he is going to make our lives better. And then we decide to vote for Jesus and support his cause depending on how we think that his plan is going to improve our lives and our lifestyle.

But that is to misunderstand Jesus and his mission. The preacher said Jesus is more like an experienced mountain guide, who is trying to get us through a difficult situation. He is not so concerned with our comfort and convenience. This is going to be difficult; it is going to take our trusting him that he knows the way through. Jesus is trying to tell us that what is at stake here is life itself and to follow him is the only way.

Jesus says we are to be more devoted to him than to our families. In Jesus' day, in his culture that was a big ask. Tribe and family was everything.

Jesus also said that we are to be more devoted to him than we are to ourselves and our own self-fulfillment. That seems to be to be the bigger ask today. Why would Jesus say that we are to be more devoted to him than to our families or ourselves, or anything else?

Because Jesus truly is the wise guide who knows much more about life than we do. He knows that selfishness, self-centeredness, self-fulfillment, is not the path to life- the abundant life we long for. My self will never be satisfied as long as it is the focus of my attention.

"Your real, new self (which is Christ's and also yours, and yours just because it is His) will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him/Jesus. Does that sound strange? The same principle holds, you know, for more everyday matters. Even in social life, you will never make a good impression on other people until you stop thinking about what sort of impression you are making. Even in literature and art, no one who bothers about originality will ever be original whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring two pence how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become

*original without ever having noticed it. The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. **Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay.** But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.” (C.S. Lewis)*

In Jesus, in devotion to Jesus first, everything else finds its proper place.

Then Jesus talks about counting the cost of discipleship and bearing our own crosses. I'm pretty sure that Jesus loses all of us somewhere in this passage. Not one of us is able to follow Jesus as his disciple all of the time, which is the point of the two parables.

A King going out to battle against a much larger army is foolish, he isn't going to win. A person without enough money to finish the tower, is foolish to begin. When we count the cost of discipleship, we fall short. None of us are qualified to be Jesus' disciples. But I think that is Jesus' point.

When we recognize that we aren't able to do this on our own, and we turn to Jesus we hear the gospel truth that Jesus loves us and gave himself for us. We see that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem and to the cross, and **He** carries the cross and **He** pays the price that I will never be able to pay.

And in that place of knowing that I can't, but Jesus can, and Jesus will walk with me, and empower me, and help me, and when I fall Jesus will take me the hand and raise me up, and he will be that wise guide who knows the way of life; I learn to follow him. I put my hand in his, I put my feet on his path, and give myself to apprenticing, learning his ways, and I find life worth living, hope that doesn't disappoint, life that is abundant and eternal.

Thanks be to God.