

## **Pastor Mollie's Sermon**

**September 1, 2019**

**Luke 14:1, 7-14- Radical hospitality- kingdom living**

My family was at a cabin this weekend with 2 other families...

6 adults, 7 kids, and 1 dog.

Our families all live in the same neighborhood together and we have been doing life together ever since we moved into the area 2 years ago.

This past year we started having dinners together a couple times a week...

Why make 3 separate dinners, when one big one can feed everyone.

But one thing we always do, and maybe you can relate....

We start counting who's turn it is to, host, to bring the main dish, to drive, to... whatever.

Instead of just hosting and enjoying one another's company

We feel we have to keep tabs on who's turn it is...

Always subconsciously trying to keep things fair...

When in essence all of us just love taking care of the other....

Our Gospel today focuses on this idea of counting....

The commentary Jesus offers,

is not addressed to those attending a banquet but to those giving it,

and it moves beyond good advice to something that might have sounded to his audience as fairly ridiculous:

don't invite those in a position to do something for you, but rather invite those who cannot give you anything in return.

Counting is everything.

Status, favors, debts, honor -- it's all about counting and reckoning and standing and the rest.

Inviting people to a banquet -- whether family, friends, or business associates

put them in your debt and made a claim on them to return this favor to you.

It's an "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine" kind of world and meals are a great way to scratch someone's back.

Which is why Jesus' "advice" probably sounded so ludicrous.

Why on earth waste an opportunity for social commerce by inviting those who have nothing to give you,

who can do nothing for you, and who typically mean nothing to you?

It's crazy.

True enough. But it's also the kingdom of God.

Secondly, Jesus takes on the social code of his day.

He lives in an honor-and-shame culture where status is pretty much everything,

and one of the key places where status was displayed is mealtime.

Guests of honor were seated close to the host,

while those of lesser importance sat further away.

And those who weren't invited at all correspondingly mattered not at all.

Status was important ... and it could be fragile.

To be invited to a better position at the table of an important host wasn't simply an honor, it could also have tangible benefits to your business as well.

Similarly, to be invited to a lower position could affect all dimensions of your life.

So, although this seems like a very specific story, Jesus is making some decent points for us to recognize for our own lives....

Typical Jesus move....

he gives what seems to be good advice --  
don't think too highly of yourself.

Be modest.

Better to start from a lower position and be invited higher than place yourself ahead of others and asked to move lower.

It's the kind of advice I might give my children this weekend as they are about to start the school year in a brand new school.

And in the sense of an honor-and-shame culture,

There is no other defense for such counsel, really, except that this is the way God wants us to treat each other.

I mean, it's the way God treats us -- creating us, giving us what we need to flourish, caring for us, forgiving us, redeeming us -- even though we can do nothing meaningful for God in return.

In fact, about the only thing we can do in return, when you think about it, is to share what we've been given with others.

This is the kingdom life, and it stands in stark contrast to the honor-and-shame world in which we live.

Wait a second! The honor-and-shame world in which *we* live?

I thought we were talking about the first century?

Yeah, we are ... BUT it's not that different from the world we occupy as well.

Do you remember how obvious the pecking order was at school?

How important it was to sit with the right folks at lunch?

How much it meant to you to have someone invite you to a party or even just save you a seat at lunch?

The clear social lines of the various groups from band, sports teams, techies, or whatever?

The seats of honor and, well, if not shame at least uncool, on the bus?

(I'd offer more examples but most of us are probably already reliving some of our worst moments!)

Our schools very much operate on a status system where everything counts and everything is counted.

Truth be told, I don't think it ends at school.

It happens in the workplace and at book clubs, mom clubs...

It happens just about everywhere; it's just a little more obvious at school.

And given that most of our kids will be returning to school this coming week or already have....

this would be a great time to ask whether our Christian faith means anything.

That's right: I don't want to preach a sermon this week that simply moralizes solely on the importance of radical hospitality, which of course is super important!

I want to share the reminder that God has given us all good things for no good reason and invites us to do the same for others.

I want to offer the opportunity to challenge us to take our faith seriously enough to act and live differently.

Why?

Because our faith only matters to us, quite frankly, to the degree that it helps navigate the daily decisions and situations that affect each of our lives.

Quite frankly, this generation of youth won't keep coming to church unless it makes a difference in their lives,

and this passage invites us to think very seriously about what the "kingdom life" might look like outside our church walls.... In schools, at work, wherever our daily life takes us.

Jesus in this passage invites us to break the rules of "what have you done for me lately?", and to value others not because of what they can do for you but because they are -- we each are! -- children of God.

Of course, things won't change in an instant... I know, because the group of our three families are still working on this hosting thing...

instead of whose turn it is... appreciate the dinner to which you have been invited... or that you are inviting.

living into God's grace and embracing and living the kingdom life takes time.

And the image of table on the front of your bulletin... is where a lot of this kingdom living happens... maybe even starts.

When we think about the tables at which we gather around...

Who we are with, where we sit, what is served.

Our gospel reminds us that the table... is sacred.

The table is not only where one may say grace;

it is the space where one extends grace.

Tables in the ancient world were places where philosophers and teachers could impart their wisdom.

Tables were also the place where a community's identity could be marked;

a Near Eastern proverb declares, "I saw them eating and I knew who they were,"

and this was not necessarily about one's distinct way of chewing food.

One's eating company says something about you and your company.

Radical hospitality is important

But living this kingdom life serving, loving, forgiving, is not about getting ahead, but simply because it's who we are created to be.