

Sermon 091816 Rally Day  
Scripture Luke 14: 12-24  
Sermon Title- Let's Party

There are many resources available to you if you would like to throw a successful social party. There are tried and true books by the twin towers of respectability, Emily Post and Amy Vanderbilt. Miss Manners would also likely to be helpful, maybe even Martha Stewart, too. Now, before you even select a menu or get to fine points like whether the wine glass goes to the left or right of the water glass or the salad fork goes to the right of left of the dinner fork, there are basic principles.

First, a proper party begins with a carefully constructed guest list. A recommended idea is to invite people with things in common- family members, friends, business associates. You also might want to consider people who have invited you to their homes whom you should repay before it gets embarrassing. You might want to consider folks that have not invited you to their homes and you might be wondering why. This way, you can shame them into an invitation. Then there are people who you'd like to know better, important people, the right people. Now one thing to be careful of... you want your guests to be close on the socio-economic scale. They should all live on the same side of the tracks. You don't want your party to be to be the time and place for your guests to learn how the other half lives.

Okay, next come the invitations. They must be clear and gracious. They should state what kind of party it is, what time guests are expected to arrive, importantly, what kind of attire will be proper. Interestingly, the men are told what to wear, which is code for the woman who have the really important decision. The invitation might say, 'Black tie, white tie, jacket and tie, or casual.' This works out for men who need simple instructions and for women who are comfortable with complexity. The invitation should, of course, request an RSVP by a certain date.

Hold on, we're still not to the menu. When the responses are received, it is important to study the guest list closely, in order to plan the seating arrangements. Here, the key is to put people together who have something in common and who will be at ease with one another. If possible, avoid sitting people who you know have or have had conflict of some sort with each other. For that matter, avoid sitting Republicans and Democrats together, and definitely not Catholics and Protestants who are former Catholics together. It might be a good idea to invite some Independents and unchurched people to serve as table buffers. Adversaries sitting at the same table should be at opposite ends so all they can do is exchange chilly smiles. As the host, make sure that the important people, the right people, are seated next to you.

Follow these principles, and you will be well on your way to a socially successful and comfortable party that is proper, pleasant, and enjoyable... or maybe not. But happily, there are other kinds of parties. There is another source that tells us how to throw a truly successful party. The book is older even than Emily Post. It is the Bible, and the expert quoted is Jesus.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus offered his guidance on how to throw a party while attending a party at the home of an important person, one of the right people, a ruler. Around the table were influential priests, successful lawyers, and other people of note. In short, it was the type of party described above that would have made Emily Post proud. Except that Jesus said something that so pointed and challenging that Emily would have gasped and blanched and maybe even fainted.

Jesus said, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Lk 14: 12-14)

Then Jesus, in his imitable style, goes on to make matters even worse- he tells a parable about the ultimate party, the feast of the kingdom of God. The parable makes it clear that some of the

people that are listening at that party are not the same people that will be at the feast of the kingdom of God. It is not that they won't be invited. They will receive an invitation like everyone else. But they will find one reason or another why they cannot come. So, at God's party, are all the people not to be found at the rulers table- the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame- people who distinguish themselves by nothing but their obvious needs and by their willingness to accept the invitation.

God's party would give no instructions on dress, nor try extra hard to get the 'proper people' to attend. When God throws the party, God invites people who have nothing in common, except the only thing that matters- that they respond to the invitation. It is a come as you are party. People can come to that party as people whose lives are unpolished, lives that are torn and broken.

I think you already know where I'm going with this. Today is Rally Day. We have an ambitious program year planned that you'll be hearing a lot about. I was in a meeting last month in which we reviewed what we have planned for just this fall and we looked at each other and said, O my gosh! But today, we party. We should consider this the pre-party, the party that sets us up for the- kingdom of God party- described by Jesus. There are, for sure, similarities.

This is a ‘come as you are’ party. This is a party where the right people are the people whose life has its tears, its breaks, its cracks. This is not a party for those who believe that they have life figured out and they need not change. This is a party for people who know that they ought to behave in a certain way and also know that they do not behave in that way as they would like, as God would like. This is a party for people who know that they can’t do this on their own. This is a party for people who know they need help. This party is a party for people who know that you get help by being helpful. This is a party where love is available to people who are available to love. This is the kind of party that Jesus is talking about.

This is the kind of messy party Jesus describes. This is a party where Republicans and Democrats sit together, not eyeing each other suspiciously but sitting side by side eyeing the Cross of Christ. This is a party where racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds are not what matters, but what matters is the need for salvation that is offered by Jesus Christ. This is a party for the new to us, the long with us, the children, the aged, and all between. This is a come as you are party but don’t stay as you are party. It is a party at which all that matters is your willingness to participate. This is the prelude to Jesus’ parable of the feast.

Exactly! This is the right event, with all the right people, held in the rightful home. This house of God is the place where we get to enjoy the warm-up for the feast of the kingdom of God. The church is the place of the “Good News,” where God loves to throw parties. And this is exactly the kind of party that Jesus has in mind. So...let’s party! AMEN