



**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2024.**

**The Guest List - Jesus turns everything upside down.**

**Scripture: Luke 14:7-24.**

What are some things you associate with a party?

What do most people today associate with church?

How can we make church feel more like a party?

That is our focus this morning.

From our Scripture, we witness, once again God's grace to all.

We are:

- The spiritually poor, with nothing to offer for our salvation.
- The spiritually crippled, made powerless by sin.
- The spiritually blind, unable to see the truth about Jesus.
- The spiritually lame, unable to come to God on our own.

God's grace is the foundation for Christian communities. Jesus talked about giving a dinner or a banquet. The man who prepares a banquet represents God who invites us all to a great banquet.

There are 2 lessons to learn from our reading.

1. We are not to seek places of honour – service is more important in God’s kingdom than status.
2. We should not be exclusive about who we invite – God opens His kingdom to everyone.

Jesus warns that He will turn things upside down, putting the great at the bottom and raising the weak to the top.

**Why 2 invitations?** This was common in traditional Middle Eastern culture. You invited guests and decided what to feed them considering their responses.

Not unlike what Kay and Di are doing for our 100<sup>th</sup> year celebration. Working out the guests and how much food to prepare.

Then there is a 2<sup>nd</sup> invite to say – come now, everything is now ready.

But listen to the excuses. I just bought a field and must inspect it. I have just bought five pairs of oxen and I want to try them out. I now have a wife, so I can’t come. No-one would buy land or oxen without inspecting them first. And the banquet was not held during the day, but after the close of the working day. The marriage would not have been recent, otherwise they would be celebrating their own wedding feast.

God has given us two invites also. The first one came from Moses and the prophets. The second from His Son. The religious leaders accepted the first invitation, but insulted God by refusing to accept His Son.

The behaviours Jesus demands are counterculture and collapses the distance between rich and poor, insider and outside. Our attitude to the marginalized is to be shaped by our experience of God's grace to us.

Meals are a visual representation of our hearts. If we are concerned for position, honour, status, or approval then that is reflected in our dining etiquette.

How do your meals express your vision for life?

Think about who is invited; how they are served; what you hope to achieve; the layout of your home.

Do they express the vision of the Kingdom of God?

Often, we maintain boundaries when offering help to people in need. We may be comfortable preparing and serving meals to the hungry, but few find it easy to sit and eat with those who need the meal.

They are different – I will cook for them and clean up, but don't ask me to share a meal or conversation with them!

Many struggle with simply being present with people in need and, in our helping roles we still exhibit a hierarchical role.

We should never allow our behaviour to say – I am able – you are unable; I can do something for you – but you can do nothing for me; I am superior to you. We must not cloak our feelings of superiority in compassion because it is patronizing.

Many who enjoy our breakfast on a Wednesday, acknowledge the service, but what they really want is for someone to be their friend.

The poor need a welcome to replace their marginalization, inclusion to replace exclusion, a place where they matter to replace their powerlessness. They need community. They need the Christian community.

If you tell someone they are a sinner who needs God, while handing them a plate of food – they will hear you saying – they are a loser who should be like you. But when you eat together as friends and tell them you are also a messed-up person, but you have found forgiveness and grace for your sins – you are on the same level.

Isn't it interesting that the outcasts and the Gentiles had to be compelled to come to the banquet. They could hardly believe they had been invited. They hung onto the rejections they knew from others.

Jesus tells us that the banquet of the Messiah is ready – are you really going to refuse your invitation.

We, too, may resist or delay responding to God's invitation and our excuses may sound reasonable – work duties, family responsibilities, financial needs, or other reasons. Nevertheless, God's invitation is the most important event in your life, no matter how inconveniently it may be timed.

Are you making excuses to avoid responding to God's call. Jesus reminds us that the time will come when God pulls His invitation and offer it to others, then it will be too late to get into the banquet.

Just like the tax collector, and the woman of the street – the sinners – Jesus is saying – these are my sort of people. We are

called to follow Christ into a broken world, welcome and support all and to state – these are Jesus’ sort of people – they are also my sort of people.