

## **The Host with the Most**

*September 2, 2007*

(Pentecost 14 - Year C)

Luke 14: 1, 7-14

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

This sermon today is an example of how the Holy Spirit can change my mind about what I am supposed to preach about.

I was all set to preach about this Gospel passage from Luke in a particular way.

Then, following the conversations that we had in our Wednesday morning Bible study, the Holy Spirit showed me a different way of looking at this biblical passage.

In the reading we heard this morning from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was eating dinner at the house of a leader of the Pharisees.

Jesus turns to the person who had invited him to dinner and says:

“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they might invite you in return, and you would be repaid.

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”

What I originally wanted to preach about was how we are supposed to do exactly what Jesus said to his host at that dinner party.

I wanted to preach about how we are *not* supposed to invite our friends and family to dinner,

But how we are supposed to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.

However, I realized that Susan and I, in our 18 years of marriage, have hosted many people for dinner in our home.

We have invited our friends, our relatives, our rich neighbors.

But not once have we ever scrapped the guest list, and invited the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.

How could I possibly preach and encourage you all to do something that I have never even done myself ?

After asking myself this question, I realized that I am not the saintly host who invites the lowly and the poor to dinner.

I realized that I am not the real host.

Jesus is the real host.

Jesus is the host, who invites me to his table.

And *I* am the one who is poor, crippled, lame and blind.

Over the past few months, I have visited with several people who are sometimes uncomfortable with coming to the altar to receive communion.

Some folks don't feel comfortable coming to God's table for communion - because they are crippled:

Crippled by the perception that Christianity is a set of rules and regulations, rules and regulations that exclude people like them.

Some folks don't feel that they are invited to Jesus' feast at this altar - because they are poor:

Poor in faith, believing that they have to know all the right answers in order to receive an invitation.

Some folks don't feel that they are invited to the table - because they are blind:

Blind to the difficult reality that they are loved, unconditionally.

Yet, no one should feel uncomfortable to come up to this altar for communion.

For it is only by God's grace and mercy that we can approach God's table.

For it is *Jesus* who is the host of this dinner party.

And Jesus openly invites the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind to his feast.

Jesus is not the kind of host who just invites his rich neighbors.

Jesus is not the kind of host, like me and Susan, who only invite our friends and family to our house.

Jesus is the kind of host who invites you and me to his table, because *we all* are the ones who are poor, crippled, lame and blind.

Mother Teresa is one of the very few people in the world who I think really was a wonderful host, who opened her heart to the poor, the sick and the lowest of the low in society.

Mother Teresa lived in utter poverty, helping the poorest of the poor in Calcutta in India.

When people list the people that they most admire because of their good deeds, Mother Teresa is usually at the top of the list.

I would think that Mother Teresa is the kind of host that Jesus wants all of us to be.

Yet, in the last few weeks, Mother Teresa's private writings have been released to the public.

What we find in her private papers is *not* the writings of a perfect host.

What we find in her private papers is the writings of a complex woman, a woman who was poor in faith, crippled by doubt, blind to how much she was loved by God and by others.

Listen to these words written by Mother Teresa:

“Where is my Faith?

Even deep down right in there is nothing, but emptiness and darkness.

My God - how painful is this unknown pain - I have no Faith...

When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven -

There is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul.

I am told [that] God loves me - and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul.”<sup>1</sup>

Mother Teresa, it seems, had as much doubt and emptiness and blindness as any of us who are sitting in this church today.

I believe that her private writings give us permission to ask questions, to doubt, to feel emptiness and pain and loneliness.

I believe that her private writings show us that *even Mother Teresa* needed a host to invite her to God's table,

Because, like us, she was poor, lame, crippled and blind.

And it is the Church, the Body of Jesus, that issues the invitation to God's table, Sunday after Sunday.

And we are to imitate Jesus by inviting *everyone* to his feast, Sunday after Sunday.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Time Magazine*, September 3, 2007

Next Sunday is Homecoming Sunday at St. Alban's.

It is my hope that we will fill these pews with the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind.

It is my hope that we will fill these pews with people like you, like me, like Mother Teresa -

People who are hungry to be loved and to be fed with the bread of heaven.

I want each one of you to commit to inviting someone else to Jesus' feast next Sunday.

Each of you - I know - knows someone who used to go to church, but they sleep in on Sundays now.

Each of you knows someone who is skeptical about religion, but considers themselves a spiritual person.

Each of you knows someone who is poor in faith, crippled by personal problems, blind to love.

Each of you knows someone that Jesus is inviting to his table, to be fed and loved and embraced.

But, Jesus needs you and me to open our mouth to issue his invitation.

When we come today to receive the bread and the wine offered on God's table,

We come at the invitation of our host, Jesus.

We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under his table.

But our host is the same Lord whose property it is always to have mercy.

Our host is the same Lord who invites the poor in faith, the doubter, the skeptic, around his generous table.

Our host is the same Lord whose property it is always, to love.

AMEN.