Luke 14:1; 7-14

Pray

There are Jesus stories that I think I understand on a philosophical or conceptual level, but actually have no personal experience with. I have never met a Samaritan, never spent time with tax collectors or shepherds, and my experience with sheep is limited to petting zoos. Today’s story however… about seeking a place of honor at a wedding party… I have lived this. Not at a wedding, nor even a dinner party, but rather one day roughly six years ago when Kris our office administrator let me know, “the mayor’s office called.” “Of course they did what did they want?” “They are inviting clergy and religious leaders to attend a press conference about getting folks to take the 2020 census but its in about an hour.” “Say no more Kris I am on my way the mayor needs me.”

Now there is truth that part of the way I view serving as Pastor is building relationships with any one and everyone. Our Gospel work is meant to be collaborative and if that happens to include the mayor’s office who am I to not take the opportunity to pursue potential partnerships. There is also truth that my ego without question played a role. Mayor and press conference sounded exciting. Now thanks to the joys of the internet I found a picture from that day.

A couple of things stand out to me about this picture and this event. First, I am not sure why the mayor’s staff picked this picture, no one looks happy to be there. But more relevant is what occurred just before the start of the press conference. Pastors, clergy, religious leaders were gathered off to the side. When the invitation was given to move around the podium there was a rush, a jockeying, maybe even some elbows used as folks strove be as close to the mayor and podium as possible. As I remember it what you see in the picture was not our original positions as either mayor’s staff or someone else rearranged us so it wasn’t just a bunch of male Pastors around the mayor. Now my memory could be faulty but I distinctly remember feeling just icky about the whole thing, even if it is important to be counted in the census. Folks had a strong desire to be more visible.

Jesus was at a dinner party and noticed folks similarly rushing for the best positions, the places of honor. He tells those listening in the words of the great prophet Kendrick, “sit down be humble.” This is not merely in regards to wedding parties nor press conferences with the mayor. Jesus is offering a new way of thinking that calls out actions that put one’s self first, over and above others. This is relevant to any of us that have ever ignored the needs of someone else, used more than our fair share of resources, or sought personal gain at someone else’s expense. Our daily life, our lived experiences can be drastically different than that of the average person in Jesus’ day. Yet, greed, selfishness, desire to get ahead, is something we all have encountered and dare I say confronted in ourselves.

Jesus words on humility invite an awareness of others, an encouragement to see outside oneself and to consider the plight and needs of our neighbor. That’s why he follows up this teaching with some words on radical hospitality. When having a party don’t invite those you want there, or don’t invite the rich or the mayor because you think being near them makes you look better, but invite those no one wants. Invite folks who can’t offer you anything in return.

Jesus is not offering practical advice but rather revolutionary practices. In a world that then and now is concerned about gaining more, more money, more followers, more power. Jesus in his proclaiming kingdom values turns it all upside down. We hear this not just in today’s passage but again and again in scripture. When Jesus says the first shall be last and the last shall be first. When he proclaims blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, and those who are rejected. He shows and tells us this revolutionary way of selfless and self-giving love when he says, “Let the little children come to me.”

I worry that we have minimized Jesus into this self-help teacher who has some decent advice to follow. We have made him more palatable so that we don’t have to stretch ourselves past the point of comfort. When what we need, what I need is a revolutionary savior who leaves nothing unchanged. This past week I was once again made so acutely aware of the need for revolution, for whole sale change and transformation, when I saw the news of Annunciation in Minneapolis. We as a nation are more concerned with our right to bear arms than a child’s right to live. I am so aware of the need for our world to transform when I see mom’s holding starving babies in Gaza. A human created Famine that could be ended with one order to let the aid trucks through.

Church, do we want to be comfortable when others are suffering? Do we want to hoard power, privilege, and resources when others just want to live? Or will we participate in radical love?

We seek to live out and embody Jesus humility and hospitality every single Sunday when we gather around this table. This worship is meant to reflect kingdom values. But it can’t be contained to just this gathering so on September 11th we are trying a holy experiment and offer a community meal open to all. In a small way breaking bread with neighbor and stranger is our attempt to participate in a kingdom that calls for a revolution but we also recognize it is and will never be enough. But God did not and has not abandoned us. For Jesus did not just call for revolution he was a revelation.

This revelation, the word made flesh, Jesus, is not metaphorical, he is not just a concept but the embodiment of divine love that we experience and are in the presence of here and now. Gathered as the body of Christ we proclaim God’s plan for salvation, for redemption, forgiveness, transformation, new life, for revolution was his own Son living, dying, and rising. Giving fully of himself and then defeating death so that we might share in the promise that greed, selfish ambition, fear, sin, and evil do not get the last word. They do not have the place of honor; they have no role and no power in God’s reign. For in this revolutionary kingdom you, me, and all have a place. May we again and again experience the revelation of revolutionary love. Amen.