

September 1, 2019

Luke 14:1,7-14

It is Labor Day Weekend. The unofficial end of summer and beginning of fall. Often, in my house, one of the meals this weekend is the final grilled hamburger and hotdog dinner of the year. It is not one of Barbara's favorite meals, but she tolerates it on the occasions, when it is the given menu for that particular day.

You may have already had this meal yesterday or on Friday. Maybe it is planned for today or tomorrow. Either way, did you think about table etiquette? Where people were to sit and why? About who to invite and why? Did your faith play a role in your decision-making?

I will admit that faith rarely plays a role in my dinner invitation plans. It is almost always the same set of friends (there really is no biological family close enough to invite). On occasion we do think that we should invite whoever had most recently invited us to dinner. I don't think it ever crossed my mind to go out to the highways and byways of life and invite to dinner any of those people Jesus suggested in today's Gospel lesson. Even though, Lord knows, I have more than enough food and they don't.

I struggle, greatly, in those moments (and there are lots of them) when I see how I fall short of living life as Jesus said and did. It is hard. There are good excuses for not inviting strangers into one's home.

- Now they would know where I live. They could just show up any time.

- Who knows if they are addicts and will come back to rob me.
- Who wants someone showing up who smells stronger and worse than the wonderful meal I have prepared
- Do they have lice, or worse, bedbugs?

Without a doubt it takes a great deal of faith to live into Jesus' suggestion of who to invite to your fancy party.

There was a time when I would have suggested that Jesus didn't really intend for us to go to these extremes; that he was just pushing the envelope a little bit to get us to at least see the "invisible" people all around us. I no longer adhere to this line of reasoning. Jesus really meant what he said and not to follow his advice is to create turmoil, divisions in ourselves and our society.

My unwillingness or inability to follow Jesus' advice is one of the countless things that fuel the divisiveness in our world. I may not be a white supremacist or a hate monger, but my inaction, my unwillingness to invite into my home people I deem undesirable, contributes to the growing divide in our world. I don't say this in an accusatory manner. It simply saddens me that in many such ways I contribute to widening the divide.

All is not lost nor am I, or you for that matter, the devil incarnate just because I/we don't follow Jesus to the letter of some law. We don't just help widen the divide. We do as much, probably more, to bring light and hope and understanding and love into the world, more building of bridges, than we do in widening the divide.

We do this every time we choose to smile and say hello to a stranger; when we share from our abundance here at church or any of the many other groups we support; when we speak up in support of someone being spoken down to; when we publicly distance ourselves from hate speech.

Of equal, if not more importance, is your support of the ministries of Amicable Church. Our homeless figures give new meaning to Jesus' nativity; our rainbow doors give love and visible support to a whole group of people our world has cast out for so long; our Thanksgiving Baskets allow those with a table and no food to be able to invite family and friends to their table. These are just three of many countless ways that have shown the world in God's kin-dom all are welcome, all are loved.

These are statements that broadcast loudly the intent of Jesus' parable in today's reading, and when we try to live into these statements we make, when we indeed in love welcome in the people we would rather not be associated with (for whatever reason), then the divide begins to lessen and we are transformed; a transformation that comes as we begin to see the humanity in the enemy, the hate-monger, the racist, or whatever other category we have named as undesirables.

I was thrilled, when first preparing for this service back in late July, to see this story of Jesus landing on this Sunday knowing it was a communion Sunday. Because it is here at God's dinner table that we can begin to practice what Jesus is calling us to do: "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" to the banquet;

invite the very people we work so hard to ignore and keep at a distance.

We here at Amicable Church practice an Open Table, a table that says all who want to partake, to share this meal are welcome to sit at the table. Jesus is calling us to open our hearts, to incarnate the Open Table in our daily living.

Here at Amicable Church, when we gather together, whether we know it or not, we are practicing living into Jesus' Open Table challenge. It is something we cannot do alone. Together we help each other live into the people and community Jesus challenges us to be. And, it is here that we build each other up, when we feel we have failed to live as Jesus taught.

Jesus' "Open Table" table etiquette, while difficult, if not impossible, to live up to or into, just our desire to follow can be a wonderful and healing thing. It can change everything.

So, when you show up for the bar-b-que, make sure you don't sit at the head of the table; work at taking a backseat, even when you find yourself in a trying situation. Following Jesus' call to be humble can be a power force for change. And when those undesirables cross your path, put a smile on your face and kind words on your tongue. You will be surprised by the result – in you, if not them.

May God bless you and all the tables you sit at, now and always. Amen.