

“Out of Extravagance”
Luke 14:7-24
Brentwood First
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Mike Magee

Scene 1 We snub God

We have all invited a friend to coffee or a meal. At first he said yes. Then, as the appointment date gets closer, your friend seems to have a better offer. You feel snubbed.

We have all seen someone at the store whom we met last week. You try to catch her eye, and she looks right through you with no glimmer of recognition. You feel snubbed.

One of your friends is angry with you. She stops returning your phone calls and your e-mails. You feel snubbed.

God throws a dinner party. A great banquet. Every one is invited. But we all have an excuse. Soccer, golf, fishing, a late night last night, disappointment in a previous church. The usual sorts of things. Everyone has an excuse. It is my belief that when we decline God’s invitation, we snub God.

Because of what Jesus did, our price of admission to God’s great banquet is free to us. Jesus has paid the price. But there is a cost. The cost of commitment. Commitment that sometimes requires us to stretch beyond our comfort zone.

Scene 2 God calls us to commit to stretching

It feels better to meet someone for coffee when we already have a good relationship with her. But God calls us to stretch beyond our comfort zone, and take people we have just met for coffee. God calls us to stretch.

There is a game we all play. It is called “Sorry.” The way we usually play this game is the first person to say she is sorry loses. But Jesus gives us a new set of rules. Because with our old rules, sometimes reconciliation never occurs. The new set of rules tells us, among other things, that the first person to say, “I am truly, sincerely, sorry,” wins. Not the last person to say this, the first one. When your friend who is angry with you quits responding to your phone calls and e-mails, you can drive over to his house and tell him face to face you are sorry, and ask for his forgiveness.

But in today's parable, God calls us to commit to another kind of stretching. To commit to welcoming the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. The stranger and the one who is angry with us. God calls us to commit.

Scene 3 God invites all of humankind

The first letter from Paul to Timothy tells us it is God's desire that all be saved. The Gospels tell us that being saved is more than just after we die. The word ~~XXXXX~~, which is usually translated "Savior," was translated in the first Greek to English Bible as "Healer." The One who heals not just our souls. But He who heals all brokenness. Not just brokenness in our relationship with God, but also brokenness in relationships with each other. Not just brokenness in relationships, but also brokenness in our physical health. And broken social systems that allow God's children to go hungry, thirsty, and without education. For salvation means healing all brokenness.

In John 3:16, Jesus tells us, "For God so loved the world," not the just church, the whole world. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John that in our Father's house there are many rooms. And in today's parable Jesus tells us it is God's desire that his house be filled. Filled with the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, the stranger, those who are angry with us, the Kekchi indigenous of Guatemala, the homeless at the soup kitchen at Downtown Presbyterian, the residents of the Somerfield nursing home, autistic children, and even you. Yes, you. For you are the one's God has called to be greeters to his house. You are the ones God has called to welcome all of God's children, like Noah invited all of creation into his Ark. There really is room for everyone in God's house.

Conclusion

Some of you know I went to business school many years ago and received an MBA degree. I cannot summarize the BIBLE in one sentence, but I CAN summarize what I learned in BUSINESS school into one sentence. Price minus cost equals profit margin. Price minus cost equals benefit. The admission price to the great banquet in God's house was paid by Jesus 2000 years ago. But the cost of discipleship is commitment. And the benefit, the profit margin, the return on your investment of commitment, is HUGE.

I am going to ask you to stand and sing a hymn, and bring your pledge for 2009 and put it on the table.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's people say ...