**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 3-21-2020
Feasting with the Pharisees**

This past week has been a rather unique one for my family. Kara was summoned to serve on jury duty several weeks ago and her week of service just concluded on Friday.

And besides her doing her civic duty this week, I got to appreciate many of the duties or responsibilities that typically fall on her within our household.

And one of those responsibilities ended up with me taking two of our cats to their check up at the vet, which thankfully I think went pretty well.

The vet asked me numerous questions about our cats and I did my best to answer her. One of the questions she had was about how thirsty they appear to be? The reason is that if a cat is overly thirsty, then there may very well be a health condition that should be addressed.

It is fascinating how this question about thirst was just this week and one of the people in the story that we are about to dive into today involves a man whose sickness would have led to him being very thirsty. A sickness that was called dropsy.

In fact, there was a proverbial staying which was “**nothing is as dry as a person with dropsy.**” Even though people with this condition had more than enough fluid, there would have been a malfunction in the body, likely in the heart or kidney.

And the setting for this story again involves food and a special gathering. This meal that Jesus was invited to take part in was a Sabbath meal. In the Jewish culture, the Sabbath day of rest is from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. And during this Sabbath, there would be synagogue worship and there would be a special Sabbath meal to take part in.

And here, as Jesus is making His long trek towards Jerusalem where He would give His life for us, Jesus is invited to eat in the home of a Pharisee.

So with the table set for another dramatic scene, please turn with me to Luke 14:1-24. We are going to look at it in 3 important sections. Let us first hear and unpack verses 1-6 together.

**1One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. 3Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” 4But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.**

**5Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+14%3A1-24&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25559a)**] or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” 6And they had nothing to say.**

In looking at this Sabbath dinner, although Jesus was invited as a guest, this group was not gathered to celebrate Him as the Messiah, but to keep a close eye on Him.

Perhaps you’ve heard the saying **“keep your friends close and your enemies closer.”** This scene seems to epitomize this. Like nearly all scenes involving Jesus and the Pharisees, the Pharisees were looking at Jesus through suspicious eyes.

In the first century, Pharisees were considered something akin to religious all-stars. These would be highly active lay leaders in congregations. Pharisees had to hold a day job, so they were not receiving income from their synagogue. But they would be seen as the ultra-devoted and highly influential religious leaders of Israel.

And they saw Jesus as a threat. A threat to their status. A threat to their reputation. A threat to their influence.

And so we read that Jesus is being carefully watched. But then we read of a man arriving on the scene and he is suddenly there in front them all. And this man is clearly sick, as he has an abnormal swelling in his body. Technically, the condition language mentions that he is suffering from dropsy. This meant that he had excessive amount of fluid in his body that would cause it to swell.

And suddenly this man is there, no doubt he had learned that Jesus was present and he knew that Jesus could heal him. And so he most likely came uninvited to this gathering.

And Jesus, in seeing this man, asks the Pharisees and the experts in the law, who were also present, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they didn’t answer Jesus.

And then Jesus gives them the answer. He takes hold of this man and heals him and then sends him on his way.

Wouldn’t it have been amazing to see this scene and this man’s swelling just come down. It would have been clear to everyone present that he was healed.

And then Jesus asks the Pharisees, “**If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out**?”

What a great question. In other words, if someone you love or something you treasure is in danger, won’t you help them, even if it’s the Sabbath?

And we read that they still don’t say anything. Sadly, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were missing the rest purpose of the Sabbath. God gave the Sabbath to mankind for the purpose of rest and recovery. They were so focused on what is considered work and what is considered not work, that they missed that the purpose of the Sabbath was for restoration and recovery.

So what better day for Jesus to be healing, recovery and restoration, than on the Sabbath? And we know that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. But the scene does not end there. Jesus continues to teach.

In verses 7-14, Luke writes, **7When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. 11For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”**

**12Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”**

At this time, where someone sat at a special dinner or gathering really meant a lot. That doesn’t seem to be the case so much today, but it really was significant at that time, if you were hoping to look important. And here, while the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely, Jesus was also watching them closely. And He notices that everyone is trying to set in more honorable spots at this Sabbath dinner.

Additionally, the popular thing to do was to invite guests to dinners or banquets that would build your connections and reputation as someone special. In some ways, it reminds me of how networking dinners or gatherings can sometimes be. It can become all about promoting oneself.

And so, people wouldn’t invite the poor and those that would be considered insignificant. And not only this, but the cultural expectation was that if someone invited you, then you were to invite them as well.

Because of these cultural expectations, the poor and others of low social status would have felt compelled to decline any offer to attend such a dinner or gathering.

The problem with this cultural tradition is that at their roots was pride. And here, Jesus teaches about what was probably the biggest obstacle that the Pharisees as a group struggled with, and the thing that all-too-frequently prevented them from coming to Christ. And this was pride.

Humility opens us up to the blessings of God and pride blocks us from the blessings of God. The Pharisees were all concerned about the reputation and looking good. Jesus lovingly offered to heal them from this state.

His cure was in blessing the poor and the needy, with no strings attached. He says “**you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous and you will be blessed if you do these things.”**

But heeding Jesus’ words would involve repenting from a self-centered life and ego-driven life.

To follow Jesus involves submitting to the truth that life is not meant to be all our social climbing. It’s about finding our identity in Jesus and living to bless others in His Name. That is the true abundant life. Again, Jesus is willing to confront and correct those cultural norms and expectations.

And finally, this scene concludes with another story from Jesus, found in verses 15-24. Luke writes:

**15When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”**

**16Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’**

**18“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’**

**19“Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’**

**20“Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’**

**21“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’**

**22“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’**

**23“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. 24I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”**

What does Jesus mean by this story? He is speaking about the kingdom of God. Entering into God’s Kingdom is like responding to an invitation to come to a feast. The Lord invites everyone, unlike the Pharisees. All are welcome in God’s Kingdom.

But many have excuses. And the well-off are predominately the ones who make excuses. I just bought a field. I just bought 5 yoke of oxen. Sometimes it is attachments to family that can hold us back from responding to Jesus --- I just got married. None of these are legit excuses. When Jesus calls us, we are to say yes, no strings attached.

What is the proper response? It is to first receive the invitation to the great feast or the heavenly banquet by responding to Jesus. We are to not make excuses, but to say yes and to come. And second, like Jesus, we are to invite others to the feast as well. None are excluded. The message of Jesus is to whosoever. The Lord receives anyone who comes to Him and His invitation is for all.

So *friends, what are we to make of this lengthy passage?*

Simply this, Jesus has brought the kingdom of God in Himself. And it’s a kingdom that is open and welcoming to anyone with no strings attached, as long as they humble themselves and submit to Him on His terms. And that offer still stands.

As thirsty as the man with dropsy was, he was thirstier to come to Jesus. Jesus not only healed his physical thirst, but in His healing, Jesus demonstrated that only He can heal the sick-sin soul. More than any day of the week, we must remember that Jesus Himself is to be our Sabbath. He invites us to come and to eat and drink from Him and His Spirit.

And this is the message that we as God’s people are called to live out and to proclaim. The invitation is for all, no matter their social status or background or challenges. We all need Him and He will welcome all who respond with gratitude.

May we as God’s church, extend Jesus’ invitation to others as well, for everyone is invited to this dinner.

Sources: BibleGateway.com, Joel B. Green – The Gospel of Luke Commentary