

Who Do You Say I Am?: a Host

Luke 14:12-24

March 21, 2010 5th Sunday of Lent

Ok, so I do think Jesus was a bit of a party animal.

Let's face it -- he liked to attend dinner parties and he proposed throwing the biggest and best dinner party of all.

It's a little ironic that a man who spent his time eating in other people's homes and really didn't have much of a kitchen of his own, would be the ***great host of the cosmos***, but that he was.

It was his plan that all those people at whose tables he ate, would one day one day be guests at his table;
at the biggest and best party ever to be thrown.

As we have seen over the past weeks, Jesus did have a plan and purpose. As Jesus scholar, John Dominic Crossan points out; Jesus revealed his plan through his program of healing and eating.

It really is a twist that Jesus healed everyone he could and ate with everyone he could as a way of inviting everyone into God's realm.

Of course, as his parable of *the Feast* pointed out, he couldn't really force people to come; he tried his best to cajole and even compel them but some decided that they just had better, more important things to do.

Nevertheless, everyone who wanted to join the party, even those who really weren't sure about it, were invited.

And interestingly those folks who chose to not come all had something in common.

Let's look again at that most famous party invitation of all time.

The Scholar's translation of this passage helps us to see Jesus' intent here.

Someone was giving a big dinner and invited many guests.

At the dinner hour the host sent his slave to tell the guests:

"Come, all is ready."

But one by one they all began to make excuses.

The first said to him,

"I just bought a farm, and I have to go and inspect it; please excuse me."

And another said,

"I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I'm on my way to check them out; please excuse me."

And another said,

"I just got married, and so I cannot attend."

So the slave came back and reported these excuses to his master.

Then the master of the house got angry and instructed his slave.

"Quick! Go out into the streets and alleys of the town, and usher in the poor, and crippled, the blind, and the lame."

And the slave said, "Sir, your orders have been carried out, and there's still room."

And the master said to the slave,

"Then go out into the roads and country lanes, and compel people to come in so my house will be filled."

So there is one who is busy investing means of production, one who is buying real estate and one who is basically busy merging the assets of a newly acquired corporation; which is what marriage among the wealthy was all about.

So in short, those who are too busy making money, usually at the expense of the poor, are not welcome in the Kingdom.

Not because God rejected them, but because they have rejected God.

And who is invited?

Everyone who wants to come to the party was invited;

including those who were unclean, impure and rejected from joining the party according to the levitical laws.

According to the levitical laws [Leviticus 21:17-20] of the Temple priests those not allowed into the presence of God included anyone who has a blemish or one who is blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles.

Such were the very one's Jesus pointed out would be **especially** invited to **his** party.

We might find this trivial and wonder why it was such a big deal, after all we invite everybody to the party and we understand that all are welcome into God's realm; but unfortunately that is still not the case for many who claim to come in the name of Jesus.

In fact I would say that most of Christendom, with the help of Constantine's sword, quickly returned to the practices of the Temple Priests and have become very exclusive about who they let into the party.

There are churches that limit the party list based on behavior.

For instance a friend of mine's father left his mother for another woman and divorced his mother.

It wasn't her decision.

She wanted to stay married.

But until her death she refused to find love anywhere else because her church told her that if she re-married she would be committing adultery and she would no longer be invited to the party.

There are churches that limit the party list based on belief.

If you don't leave your brain at the door and claim to believe some very impossible and fanciful propositions then you are not invited.

I honestly doubt if the Apostle Paul, or even Jesus for that matter, would be invited to the party according to many churches.

Some churches even limit the invitation list based on which political positions you take.

As we recently heard some people would like to exclude all those folk who think that social justice is important.

Again, I doubt that Jesus would be invited to that party.

Joanne Buchannan-Brown who is a chaplain at the women's prison, says that prisoner after prisoner has arrived at where they are because they believe that God just doesn't love them.

God is so judging and demanding that there is no way they could please God, there's no way that they could ever be accepted by God, there's no way that they could ever be on the invitation list to the party. So guess what -- they just gave up trying.

Heck, if you're never going to be invited then why waste your time; get what you can, as soon as you can, any way you can.

To them Christianity is all about keeping them out.

And of course there are churches that will shorten the party invitation list because some folk are just unclean; you know – the homosexuals, the transgenders, the effeminates and the butches; for others it's the homeless, the wetbacks, the welfare mothers. And of course there are some that will only let you **half way in** if you're female.

Let's be honest, it's this editing of the invitation list that is at the source of some of the world's worst problems.

Israel & Palestine, Shiite & Sunni & Christian & Jew, Hindus and Muslim and Kurds & Bahi & Sufi;

they all have decided that only their folk are invited to the party and nobody else.

You know, I bet that there's even a whole bunch of atheists who would like to come.

Sure, they might tell you that they don't believe that the host really exists.

But if there's gonna be a party, well, they would still like to come.

The problem with the world today – people just don't know how to party.

Yes, Jesus is the host with the most, but there is another word for 'host' that is used more often in religious circles – 'priest.'

The priest is the gatekeeper.
The priest is the one who sends out the invitation and takes you into the party and provides you with all the goodies.

It was the understanding of the early church, and our understanding, that Jesus is our High Priest;
replacing the High Priest of the Jewish Temple and it is he who is now the host of the party.

But you know what – we in the UCC, we believe in the priesthood of all believers – we are all hosts.
Jesus is the High Host, but we are all hosts.

Everyone of us is authorized;
NO!-- more than authorized, **we are called**, called to be a host, to invite everyone into God's presence and most especially to invite those who may think they are not invited.
We need to make a special effort to invite them.

Coaches will tell you,
“You play the way you practice.”
So let's get a little practice.

Turn now to the person next to you, behind you, in front of you, below you and above you and say to them – “You’re invited.”

YOU’RE INVITED!
(move to communion)